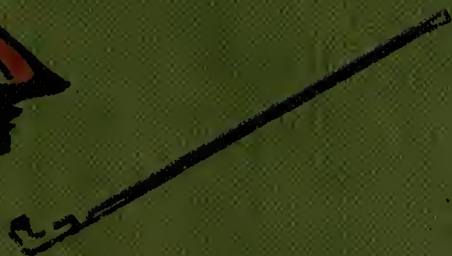


PONGO *and the*

BULL

*Hilaire
Belloc.
M.P.*



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PONGO
AND THE BULL

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BY
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"EMMANUEL BURDEN, MERCHANT"
"MR. CLUTTERBUCK'S ELECTION"
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CHAPTER I

“ The great practical advantage of the English bi-party system is that it provides an alternative Government ready to take the place, without friction or disturbance, of an Administration that may have lost the confidence of the country.”—GUIZOT.

DOLLY, the Prime Minister of England, was in 1925, though still popular, no longer young : indeed he was in his sixty-sixth year.

His old trouble with his left (or was it his right ?) lung had curiously enough disappeared with advancing years. The climate of the Roussillon had helped to do this in part, but in part also the great care which he had taken of his health since his first warning.

The doctors had given it a name ; they had continued to give it the same name, but he knew that he was no longer affected by it and it was a relief to him.

It was a further relief to him that as the years passed a sort of definition had come into his private life : a clearly marked boundary between those whom he knew and could trust and were of his own world, and younger, or newer, outer things. It happens to every

man who is famous in a trade and will stick to that trade long enough: the enmities die out, the causes of enmity are forgotten, long custom and habit gather a crust of reverence about them until at last the cabmen and the crossing-sweepers, and boys at school, cads, dons, and provincials—all manner of men—feel something of religion for the man as for an institution.

So it was now with Dolly. Indeed no one called him Dolly now, except older people of quite his own set, and this separation and distinction confirmed him and gave him repose. In some ways he felt a younger, certainly a more contented man than he had been in that short but very troubled period ten years before, when the sudden madness of one member of his Cabinet and the kidnapping of another had led him the painful dance which those acquainted with the names of George Mulross Demaine and Lord Repton of Biggleswick will shudder to remember.

In those ten years many things had happened besides the improvement in his health and the added dignity of his public repute.

For one thing he had married.

He had married a woman thirty years younger than himself, a woman whose foreign extraction (she was a De Villon) was no reproach to

him, and who had for years lived in the same set as himself; the confidant of his own confidant, Mary Smith; almost the adopted daughter of the Duke of Battersea; the bosom friend of Victoria Mosel, and a hostess to half London. It had proved a happy marriage.

It was now over eighteen months since the last general election had given him and the National party a normal majority of over 80. The Parliament had got into its stride; the first of his great measures—the nationalisation of the South-Eastern and Chatham and Dover Railways—the first of the great economic experiments—had not only triumphantly passed into law, but was working with complete success.

In this masterpiece of reform he had received the support of the new and small, but strikingly disciplined, Socialist party, which not only heartily welcomed the experiment (as a matter of course) in theory, but also, what was much more important, backed him loyally through the practical details of committee.

The new Socialist party gave itself no name; it had come to be called, in popular phraseology, “the Straights”—a name drawn from a famous phrase in a speech of their founder and leader, delivered five years before when they were a group of no more than fifteen in the House of

Commons. The Duke of Battersea, whose wide range of sympathy and action extended to the political world, was keenly interested in them; and it was a pretty touch in the hurly-burly of party politics to note the continued aid and support which the Prime Minister's own wife afforded them in their social work.

It was due to their support that Dolly had overcome the arbitrary and factious opposition of such moss-grown and doctrinaire Radicals as objected to the voting of perpetual annual payments to the old shareholders in the railways, and the naming of his first cousin, his nephew, and his private secretary as directors for life at £5000 a year. The Straights, I should add, had been equally loyal and sane in voting solidly the annual supplementary sums which were necessary to produce a profit. The steady fall of the National securities (which is, after all, but an inevitable phenomenon of our time) had a little hampered the finance of the great measure; but the nationalisation of this first railway was not a work which any statesman now wished to see undone, and the best proof of its complete success was the anxiety of the London, Brighton, and South Coast, the Great Eastern, the Metropolitan, the Cambrian Railways, the Thames Steamboats, and the

Isle of Wight companies to be included in the scheme.

The Prime Minister's mind was at rest save for the grave and terrible Indian business, the full weight of which the nation had not yet felt but which he knew too well.

It was the spring of that year, 1925. The House was within a few days of rising for the Whitsuntide recess. There was no pressing foreign business, in Europe at least; and the small house party, of which he found himself a member at historic but cosy Habberton during the week-end, was congenial in every way to his mood, and even to his anxiety; for Mary Smith, his hostess, had been careful to ask Mr. Pennybunt, the Leader of the Opposition, to meet him.

There were not a dozen of them staying in the house, and of that dozen only four were of the older generation to which the Prime Minister belonged: Mary Smith herself, G. Quinlan Smith, the very aged and exceedingly wealthy American uncle of her dead American husband, the Leader of the Opposition, and a much younger woman, but one attached to them from old times, Victoria Mosel. The rest were anybody—a few youngsters, an actress, a French singer from Martinique, and Mr. Cole, who looked after Mary Smith's pet hobby, the

herd of Herefordshire cattle for which Habberton was famous. There was nothing to annoy, to ruffle, or to disturb.

Dolly found himself walking in these early days of a late and cold spring upon the Sunday morning just before lunch with the Leader of the Opposition. Both men had just risen after a long and much-needed rest, the mind of each was fresh for the extreme beauty of the Somersetshire hills around them, and a companionship of sympathy, even closer than that which they had so long enjoyed, united them as they slowly paced down one of those avenues of Marayahs for which historic but cosy Habberton is famous. It was a long avenue, and the glorious Caucasian flowers now breaking into bloom framed each side of it with a deep crimson which almost made one forget the powerful and slightly offensive odour of that foreign but fashionable shrub. A soft moss had long been allowed to cover the gravel of the broad walk, and the footsteps of the two statesmen passed over it as noiselessly and as easily as did in their minds the progress of their common thoughts.

They paced the full length of the avenue together. Dolly's tall, bowed, and now somewhat pathetic figure, with its insufficient white hair and drooping eyes, made the Leader of the

Opposition seem in comparison a short and stoutly built man.

Indeed the Leader of the Opposition *was* short in stature, even for the family his own name had been the first to adorn. He was in height but five feet four inches, and few men who have made a great impression upon their contemporaries could boast so little personal beauty as the Leader of the Opposition. There must have been, as journalists perpetually maintained, some magnetic charm about the man to compensate for physical defects that would otherwise have marred his career.

The sturdy carriage, which so many had noted ten years before in the then Secretary for India, had passed, as the years advanced, into corpulence. But there was no unwieldy breadth of shoulder or protuberance of chest about the man. The increase in bulk was rather abdominal, and in profile the striking pear-shaped figure recalled that which is conventionally attached to the citizens of the town of Nottingham.

Much of an earlier vigour, however, still remained to him, especially in the action of his legs as he walked. These were short—far too short for the trunk which they supported—and singularly sharp and jerky in their stride, while his arms, which were, on the contrar y

of abnormal length, hung at his sides with a sort of preparation for action in them which was one of the most noticeable factors in his general appearance. One had an odd feeling that if he stooped ever so little his hands would trail upon the ground.

All this, however—the pear-shaped trunk, the lengthy arms, and the insufficiency of the lower limbs—was not what chiefly arrested attention, though such an exterior had gained for him among his colleagues in the House (before age had added respect to his name) the half-familiar, half-affectionate, nickname of “Pongo.” What so struck his contemporaries that even chance onlookers, ignorant of his great political position, were drawn to turn in the streets and glance again at the man, was the expression of the face.

Above a thin mouth, to whose length Nature had added perhaps an inch beyond the normal, and which was invariably set in a straight, firm line, stood a small strong nose as full as the mouth itself of energy and determination, in shape not unlike a champagne cork, and in character alive with promptitude. The wide-set eyes you would have thought lethargic (for they were habitually half closed) until you became aware, when they once turned upon you, that there gleamed behind the fallen

lids an intense concentration of expression such as in lesser men is lit up by the prospect of unexpected gain.

The hair which framed all this was coal-black, heavy with an appearance of heaviness due rather to its lustrous texture than to its amount, for at a patch upon the poop he was bald. It lay flat from a parting at the side, brushed square over the forehead, and hung as flatly down either edge of the cranium; for the Leader of the Opposition was Cornish by descent,* and his father, a dentist in Camberwell, was junior to the more famous brother who had for ten years been permanent head of the Fisheries, and who had spent his life in that department. His grandfather was the Pennybunt mentioned in a footnote of the Worrall Memoirs with regard to the arrest of Leslie during the Chartist trouble.

So they went side by side, and the destinies of the country with them.

The Prime Minister had a great deal to say. It was a full week and more since he had had an opportunity for close and private conversation with his colleague, yet it was long since the necessity for such a conversation had

* Pennybunt—a Saxon corruption of “Pen-y-buint,” “Head of the Buint,” but what is “Buint”? See Carrol: “Travels in Spain.” There may have been Pennybunts in Tregarth under James I.—or there may not.

been more urgent. The first and the imperative thing was to tell Pennybunt how things really stood in India, and he told him without reserve, the shorter man nodding gravely at those parts of the news with which he was already acquainted, and stopping his companion to ask some sharp and decisive question upon points that were new to him.

Briefly, it was worse than the Prime Minister himself had thought when they had last met, and, above all, it was more uncertain. He could not say whether the famine had been the cause of the very violent outbreak in Gordon's district or not. He thought Gordon injudicious; he had known him for years, but the Viceroy swore by him and he had the wholehearted support of his colleagues on the spot. What was much graver than the disaffection of those unarmed and starving peasants was that all that gathering menace on the North-West frontier had come to a head, and after so many years of peace, perhaps unwise, there was certainly going to be fighting—and big fighting.

Now, that peril had threatened so long—for twelve years at least, and for nearly fifteen if you count the report of 1911—it had been so constantly preached by the most credited of the Indian Administration and yet so constantly belied by the calm of each succeeding spring,

that the politicians at home—even the gravest of them—had begun to be a little sceptical. Dolly for his part had always inclined to the gloomy side. But the policy, now twenty years old, of leaving the Hill people to themselves, seemed to have worked: there had been no expedition, and, as it seemed, no necessity for one. Both men remembered how three little troubles during that long space of years had each been certainly thought the precursor of the storm, and how the storm had failed to break.

That spring day, as the two men turned again on the broad walk at Habberton, the Prime Minister told his companion that he thought it had broken. It might be a week or ten days or a fortnight, or it might be a month, but it was coming. He gave his reasons.

Pennybunt's first inquiry was how the finance of the situation stood. It was to this that the Prime Minister was leading him.

As the shorter man asked the question, the taller one linked his right arm into the other's left, and then, feeling the gesture too familiar, withdrew it. He told him after a little pause that the finance was dicky, and that was just the trouble.

Close as must be the association of men of the first rank in political life, Pongo had not appreciated the gradually increasing tension for

money which Dolly's administration had felt : during his own short tenure of office two years before there had been some embarrassment, but it had passed. Pongo's Chancellor had tried no great experiment. The decline of the national credit had been but gradual under him, and at one moment there was even a slight recovery : the increase of the national expenditure, though large, was natural and easy during those four years ; the great Naval Loan had been successfully floated ; and Pennybunt could hardly conceive of borrowing as anything worse than a regrettable, but always a feasible, thing—feasible as a matter of course. The effect of a loan upon securities might make one pause—one might have to take the advice of experts upon the exact moment to act—but that there should be any real difficulty in raising a large loan in England and for English purposes seemed to a man of Pennybunt's traditions and experience impossible. All sorts of faddists had prophesied the evil day for years past. The evil day had never come. Harwich, who was said to know more about the national revenue, and *did* know more about Parliamentary procedure and otter-hunting than any other man, had said it so often that people had ceased to believe him. Now poor Harwich was dead and had not lived to see his jeremiads come true.

It was increasingly clear as the Prime Minister continued his confidences, or rather his search for support and advice, that there had been a very bad hitch indeed. There had been a singular slackness of competition in securing the Indian Loan when it was first hinted at. Then, when things got more definite, there had arisen a very singular crop of proposals, limitations, and conditions; the negotiations had now dragged so long that the ordinary methods were exhausted and it looked as though they would have to seek the loan as a favour.

It was not from lack of foresight that such a deadlock had come: Dolly and Dolly's advisers had seen what was coming since September, when Gordon's secretary was killed. It was not from public panic; nothing was allowed to get into the papers, and news that was common property in Paris was still rigorously shut down in London. Even in Dublin those who wished no good to this country knew more about the affairs of India than did the ordinary citizen of the capital, for since the settlement of the Irish business the Press in Dublin was free.

Dolly repeated it and repeated it (for Pennybunt questioned him closely); the hitch was not due to any kind of public panic; but every one

of the great houses had asked privately for conditions which he could not give. He would not ear-mark any source of revenue. He would not secure the loan upon anything less worthy of his office than the word of the nation. Above all he would have no guaranteeing of it upon reproductive relief works. It would be a detestable precedent. It would be a permanent humiliation and weakness to British Government. When Dolly feared at last that he would fail at home, he had sent Benson to Paris, and if any one could have done it Benson was the man. Benson had failed in Paris as well. There was nothing for it but to make some sort of personal appeal. Both men were thinking of the same name, but Pennybunt suggested it first after a few seconds of silence: it was the Duke of Battersea's.

The Duke of Battersea, the chief and the most respected of British financiers, was now a very old man. His landing in this country as plain Mr. Barnett, the early prejudice against him on the failure of the Haymarket Bank, his resurrection with the making of M'Korio were things of a generation ago—forgotten to-day. Some still remembered the Lord Lambeth of the beginning of the century and his active philanthropic work, notably the 5 per cent. model dwellings that had gained him first in the street,

later with the rich, the rough but loving title of the Peabody Yid.

He was the very centre of Dolly's world, Mary Smith's constant and firm friend, a sort of genial old godfather to all her people: and at the same time his name alone could support the credit of a country. England had done well to forget her grudge against such a man, and now, in her need, his name came naturally into the mind of those two men who were consulting upon the honour and the necessities of England.

They had turned for the third time in their pacing of the walk when that name was spoken. Pennybunt added hurriedly: "Of course, you've seen him?"

"N-n-o, I haven't," said Dolly slowly. "I kept it as a reserve . . . and I'm not absolutely sure . . ."

The Leader of the Opposition was not quite of the world to which his colleague belonged, but he knew enough about that world—after all, he had dined in it now for half a dozen years—to know that Dolly could go to Battersea House and speak of the thing exactly as a man would speak to a friend about a horse. He knew that Dolly's wife was almost part of the Battersea household, and he wondered what the cause for any hesitation could be.

Suddenly, and as though he were talking about a different matter, Dolly broke in, his voice somewhat higher than it had been and not quite so restrained :

“ You know about the Straights ? ”

Pongo answered vaguely that of course he knew about the Straights. He made some popular joke about the Straights' support of the National party, and he laughed. “ They're *your* majority,” he said ; he chuckled again.

But Dolly was very grave. “ You know how much the Straights think of my wife ? ” said Dolly bluntly.

“ I know that they have the highest opinion of her judgment and that she's made them if anybody has,” answered Pongo reverently.

“ Well,” said Dolly in the tone of a man who is saying a thing one says only once in a lifetime (and as he said it he was unable to repress that sharp, furtive, double glance to right and to left which is perhaps native to politicians), “ the Straights want relief works—nothing but relief works. They've begun to work the Press about it. They might perfectly well break away if the Indian policy didn't suit them.”

“ Of course,” said Pennybunt. He saw nothing wonderful in that.

“ Yes, but,” said Dolly tenaciously, “ that

means a majority against the loan . . . for I won't *budge*."

"But *our* side shouldn't allow that," said Pongo half amused and half aghast. "Why . . . why . . . why that would mean dissolution! The country wouldn't understand it unless there was a dissolution! and then the loan *must* be . . . oh, nonsense—it's a nightmare!" No, Pongo would never allow his party to play foul.

"You mean," said Dolly, "the Straights would go into the lobby alone?"

"Can't answer for the wild men," said Pennybunt cheerfully, "but there's no sort of danger."

"What about your party in the country?" said Dolly vaguely.

"Oh, Ludlow tells me about that," answered Pongo as vaguely. Young Ludlow, his chief Whip, was not very capable, but he was there to do that sort of work, and Pongo always passed on to him any inquiries about the party.

"Yes, but I mean," said Dolly, speaking with the irritation of a man who isn't understood, "you've got to do something in the House to make your lot understand."

"Of course," said Pongo in the same natural tone he had used before.

"Well, what?" said Dolly.

"Oh, I don't know," said Pennybunt, lapsing

into vagueness again—"anything. I'll tell 'em I've just heard grave news. Majesty's—Government—must—be—carried—on. Anything, damn it!" he added cheerfully.

Dolly did a little thinking. "You see," he said, feeling for his words, "you never can tell. . . . Your lot *may* get up a cave—'specially if the Straights bolt!"

"Well, why should the Straights bolt anyhow?" ventured Pongo.

That was the root question of all, and the hardest one for Dolly to answer, but it had to be faced, for the compact between the two men was too grave to be shirked upon any plea whatsoever.

"Peggy may want them to," he said slowly.

Pennybunt swivelled his large flat face with its frame of black hair slowly round on its thick neck, to look full at the Prime Minister as they walked. But the Prime Minister, with his hands in his pockets, continuing his long strides, still gazed at the ground.

"Why on earth should your wife . . ."

"Well, she does!" snapped Dolly.

"Why on earth should your wife," repeated Pennybunt, who was not the most gentle of men on occasion, "want to break your majority?"

"I didn't say she did," grumbled Dolly, "I said she *might*. She might think it the best

moment to go to the country—she's a fixture at the Batterseas," he added, going the whole hog in his confidences.

"O-o-h, I see . . ." said Pennybunt; then, suddenly, "But, good Lord! what about India?"

"Oh, I'm not going on about it," said Dolly—the conversation was turning on itself and losing its utility, as conversations will. "If the Batterseas—and that's Peggy—want the Straights to bolt, they'll get it. All the Straights were afraid of was the money for an election, and, mind you, she'll take it for granted that your lot'll vote with the Straights . . . so will the Yid!"

"He won't want it if you can fix it up with him about the loan," said Pongo.

"No," said Dolly, "but I haven't been near him yet, as I've told you; if he wants a dissolution he'll make my wife want it next . . . and when Peggy wants it she'll count on your lot going with the Straights."

"Well, she won't get 'em," said the Leader of the Opposition, loyally. "That's all settled!"

But Dolly was not yet content to be silent. "She's abroad, you know," he said.

"Yes, I know," said Pennybunt with respect. Then he asked as one might any ordinary, similar question: "When do you expect her back?"

The Straights won't do anything till she does come ! ”

Dolly didn't answer. “ If the loan's all right, Pongo,” he said. “ we could take the vote immediately after the Whitsuntide recess. That's at once ; ten days. Rise next Wednesday. Meet on Whit-Tuesday, and take it *then*.”

“ As soon as ever you like,” said Pongo. “ Do it quickly, plead urgency—first day if you like. Whit-Tuesday if you like.”

Dolly was still thinking. Pennybunt added :
“ There certainly won't be any real trouble about the Duke of Battersea helping in the end—when the loan's really urgent ? ”

“ N-n-o,” said Dolly, rather as though he were cogitating than hesitating. “ The papers take the loan for granted. They think it's done. That'll help,” encouraged Pongo.

“ Y-e-s,” said Dolly.

“ Then I don't see what more there is to bother about ; if you're sure of Battersea. Only see him at once,” said Pennybunt briefly. He thought of himself as the business man of the two, and he wished in his heart that he stood in Dolly's shoes in such a crisis. As for the Chancellorship, a long process of choosing the weakest man with the object of dodging the third change in the new tariff, had landed George Mulross Demaine

in that once considerable office, and he might just as well not have been there. One might say that Dolly was his own Chancellor.

The two men had no more to discuss; for Pongo the thing seemed settled. The Prime Minister's wife was abroad, and presumably not to be back for some time. The Straights must do without her. The Straights might bolt, and if so they would bolt alone, with perhaps one or two wild men of the Opposition, but Pongo flattered himself he could make such an effect upon the House with his declaration of urgency that precious few men would dare to bolt. It was only a question of getting that loan taken and of whanging the Bill through. Dolly was less certain, but Pongo's cheerfulness encouraged him—after all, Peggy was a long way off, abroad, visiting. . . .

Pennybunt looked at his watch. He had felt for half an hour past that expectation of good food which is amongst the chief joys of political life; and even Dolly, who was far from being so hearty a man, looked forward to the luncheon that awaited them. They went down the hill together towards the house.

As they neared it Pennybunt said a few words that all the inner ring had repeated a hundred times in the last few months:

“ Thank God we're rid of the Irish ! ”

“ Yes, thank God for that ! ” said Dolly fervently. But he knew his wife better than Pennybunt did, and he would have given a good deal to know just where Peggy was on that Sunday before Whitsun. He was ill at ease.

CHAPTER II

“There is but one mark which distinguishes the gentry: it is not the habit of wealth; it is not leisure; still less is it any moral quality of charity or courage—it is an unalterable ease of manner.”—JEANNETTE C. GRISSELL (“George Pounder”) in “New England Pearls.”

MARY SMITH, a few moments later at luncheon, suggested very genially that they had been talking shop.

The Prime Minister nodded; his mouth was full and he could not speak.

The Leader of the Opposition, whose youth had been spent in stricter surroundings than those of the Prime Minister, waited until he had swallowed a very large piece of Spanish ham, and then said “Yes,” and nodded also.

“You have been talking about the dissolution,” said Mary Smith with decision, but a little nervously.

The Leader of the Opposition said “Yes,” and the Prime Minister said “Not exactly”; he said they had been talking about when the elections should be. And Mary Smith, who had but a vague idea of the difference between the two, and only knew in a general way that they were

related as cause and effect, said thoughtfully, "I see."

There was a great deal of grey in the darkness of her hair, but she disdained to bleach. It was not in her traditions, nor, for that matter, in her style. The Prime Minister continued to eat in a fatigued manner, and the Leader of the Opposition, whose figure when he was sitting down, and when the length of his arms and the shortness of his legs were less conspicuous, had a certain dignity about it, continued also to eat with the greater vigour of his lesser years. So far these three were alone.

"Well, what have you decided?" asked Mary Smith.

"We haven't decided anything," answered the Prime Minister, a little peevishly. And there was a great silence for the space of about four mouthfuls. Then Mary Smith volunteered:

"When's Peggy coming back?"

It was not a very fortunate remark. The Prime Minister said snappishly: "I don't know. She's down among those little French railways; she's coming up North slowly."

"Why don't you wire to the bank in Paris?" suggested Mary. "She always calls there on her way back; she's got to; she runs short."

"Yes," assented the Prime Minister, "she runs short—but there isn't any hurry."

“I’ll wire ; I’d like to hear from her,” ventured Mary.

“Oh no, Mrs. Smith, don’t bother about it,” blurted the Leader of the Opposition stupidly enough, and then, feeling he had said too much, drank a very large glass of wine quickly and choked. To cover his retreat he said suddenly : “I shall have to go up to town rather early to-morrow.”

“I know that,” said Mary Smith sharply, “you’ve said it three times, and I’ve got the fat motor ready for you because you objected to the thin one.” She had put herself out a good deal about it, and she didn’t like its being taken for granted.

“I know,” said the Leader of the Opposition eagerly, and talking for talk’s sake to cover his confusion. “I wish I hadn’t got to go, but I must be there by one. Are we going together ? ” he asked, looking at Dolly.

“Yes, I suppose that will suit you best, Mary,” said Dolly. “But I’m not going early, he added in alarm, “I’m not going by that eleven o’clock express of yours.”

“There isn’t any other train at all until three,” said Mary. She was a good deal annoyed that her convenience should be so little consulted.

“Very well,” said the Prime Minister, nodding at Pongo. “Let him go with the motor to the 11 o’clock ; I’ll see when I go.”

“ You haven’t told me what you’ve arranged yet about the dissolution,” Mary Smith was beginning, when Victoria Mosel came into the room humming loudly; she was in her riding-habit, not much splashed, her hair tidy, and her eyes full of a curiosity which made Dolly, who was about to answer, shut his mouth like a steel trap. He shut it so suddenly that for a moment a look of decision came into his face, but it was evanescent. She passed on, still humming louder than ever, to a sideboard, cut herself a large slice of cold meat, and bore her plate to the place by the side of the Leader of the Opposition. The ten years which had passed since the reader last met her (if he ever did) had left her still unmarried. She drew her chair in noisily against Pongo’s, gave him a hearty slap on the back, and begged him not to mind her if he was talking shop; then added:

“ I can always pump Mary, you know.”

“ There is nothing to pump, Vic,” said Mary Smith a little sharply.

“ Yes there is,” said Victoria Mosel calmly, “ but it doesn’t matter anyhow, for it’s all out.”

“ Then you know more about it than we do, Miss Mosel,” said Pennybunt grimly.

“ Aunt Rebecca does,” said Victoria unper-
turbed. And a vision of the Duchess of

Battersea floated before the perturbed minds of the two politicians.

Two more of the party strolled in ; two of the younger ones, brothers, a couple of Mary's innumerable cousins ; they went and stood with their backs to the fire.

"Aren't you going to eat anything?" said Mary Smith.

"Just had breakfast," said one of them. The other one turned his back to the company, put his hand out toward the fire, and shivered. "It's filthily cold this morning," he said.

"You should go out and walk as we have," said the Leader of the Opposition kindly.

"No, thank you," said the young man, and continued to warm himself, while his brother gazed up at the ceiling and slowly filled a very large pipe. Then he bent his head down, put the pipe in his mouth, and as slowly lit it, puffing large clouds of smoke towards the food on the table as he meditated upon all things human and divine.

There was a silence until Victoria Mosel, having thoroughly finished her plate of meat, and decided to eat no more, whipped out a cigarette, and as she was lighting it mumbled :

"Peggy's back !"

"What !" shouted the Leader of the Opposition, quite forgetting his manners.

“ I told you so,” said Dolly, with a curious smile.

“ You did nothing of the sort,” snapped Mary Smith. “ Do you mean to say you knew it all the time and didn’t tell us ? ”

The Prime Minister, who loved a reputation for eunning, looked quizzical and said nothing.

“ Where is she ? ” said the Leader of the Opposition at last, a little wildly.

“ Aunt Rebecca’s, of course,” said Victoria Mosel, enjoying her triumph.

It was now the Prime Minister’s turn to be annoyed.

“ Oh, damn her ! ” he said savagely. “ Are they on the telephone ? ”

“ Yes, but I’m not,” said Mary Smith smartly. . . . “ There’s a telephone in the village, if you’re so keen . . . and the Institute has got one too.”

“ That’s no good,” said the Prime Minister, in more excitement than he cared to show. “ One ought really to be on the end of a wire for this sort of thing. I don’t want to find she’s out and then go back and find she’s in, and all the rest of it. I want to talk. It’s just like her to go to Battersea House and not let me know,” murmured the Prime Minister. “ Who’s there, Victoria ? ” he added anxiously.

“ I was going to ask you that myself, Miss

Mosel," said Pennybunt, "because I think a friend of mine is there."

"Well, I wasn't going to tell either of you," said Victoria Mosel, "because I don't know."

"It doesn't make things any easier," sighed the Prime Minister half to himself, and he added: "What a stinking business! . . . I do wish," he went on in his querulous high tone, "one could make her understand how that sort of thing puts everybody out!"

"Oh, she understands that all right," said Victoria Mosel calmly.

"When did you hear from her, Vic?" asked Mary.

"I didn't hear from her—Aunt Rebecca told me; got a letter last night."

"Then why on earth didn't you tell us?" muttered Dolly.

"The lion," said the young man who was smoking his pipe by the fire, "is let loose."

His brother, still shivering, and with his back still turned, with his hands still spread out towards the fire, remarked that it was filthily cold.

"I wish," said Mary Smith, "you boys wouldn't stand there making remarks. It's not your business."

"Mary, Mary!" said the young man who was smoking, as he held up one finger with mock gravity.

“Well, it’s all very well,” said Mary Smith, “but you’re not eating, and you’ve no business to be here.”

“I’m smoking,” said her cousin by way of excuse, “and Jack’s warming himself.”

The Prime Minister sighed deeply, got up from his chair, went to the big window, and looked out upon the park.

“If I were you two,” said Victoria Mosel, turning with a kindly tone towards the Leader of the Opposition, who sat staring at his plate, “I should sleep upon it.”

The Leader of the Opposition got up more impatiently than had his colleague, for he was a younger man, and the moment he was standing he seemed shorter again. He folded his long arms behind his back, and after a little thought came to a decision. He walked out by the door which led into the library, saying that he must write some letters.

The Prime Minister, when he had surveyed for perhaps five minutes the distant landscape, the Herefordshires grazing all together in the park, and the fall of the sward away from the house towards the woods (while the rest talked of nothing, and Victoria Mosel smiled like a sphinx in her enjoyment) sauntered out by the opposite door which led into the hall.

“You’re not going to sit there all day, Vic-

toria, are you?" said Mary Smith, almost angrily.

"No, dear," said Victoria smoothly, "I'm coming with you." The fag-end of her cigarette was now hanging limp, glued to her lower lip as was its habit when she was having a really good time inwardly.

Mary Smith went out bustling to the library; Victoria Mosel following her, picked up a piece of bread and threw it at the elder of the two lads, who ducked, and in playful repartee hurled a cushion from a chair. Just as she went out she tapped at the window-pane so that the other lad, who was still warming himself, turned round sharply, and both the young men saw what she was pointing at; the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition were sauntering together in deep communion on the fringe of the lawn.

"Poor Pongo!" said Victoria as she went out.

The two young men sank listlessly into two chairs by the fire to consider what form their next activities should take.

And this was the way the great news came to Habberton.

* * *

G. Quinlan Smith, the very aged and important, a small and shrivelled, but still alert, figure, came into the dining-room; he was looking straight

before him and he paid no more attention to the young Englishmen than they to him. He was used by this time to the easier manners of the Old Country, but in *his* youth he had risen before his elders and he had called his father "Sir."

Under his right arm he was carrying with some difficulty an enormous atlas. He pushed the plates away so as to make a space upon the big table, laid the atlas down carefully, opened it at the map of India, poured himself out a glass of water and cut himself a neat sandwich; as he ate the one and sipped the other he pored upon the map before him. He was an old man, with only one mania and a hundred interests, and these last played upon every fact and figure which he came across with an astonishing vivacity for his age—and Lord! how old he was! He had actually marched as a boy against the Rebellion. He had seen a thousand things, but he had cared principally for one, which was the establishment of the great fortune he now commanded.

When, thirty-five years before, Mary Smith had married his nephew, Bartelot Smith, of Bar Harbour, Maine, and the New Bessemer, Birmingham, Alabama, he was already one of the richest men in the country, and that nephew, mainly through his connection, had left Mary

Smith, after less than a year of married life, the wealthy widow she still was.

G. Quinlan Smith had grown with the times. He commanded as many millions as you might choose to name, and the proportion that he owned out of what he commanded was indifferent to him ; it was the command that pleased. But what he actually owned was enough to make him first the equal, and now the superior, of the great banking houses which the European gentry had long since learnt to fear. He had been in England for two months, after passing the best part of the year before in the States and on the Continent ; and, being in England, he stayed, as he always did, with his nephew's wife. He was fond of her. She was the only person except his secretary who never reminded him of his deafness.

For G. Quinlan's deafness was the one reality he could not bear to face, and the one truth the presentment of which disturbed his admirable self-control.

The two young men, who had met him on this visit for the first time, had long ago given him up. Had they been a little older they would perhaps have been more assiduous. The servants were instructed not to answer him but to take his orders, and as for Victoria Mosel, when she came down to the house-party and found him at

Habberton, she clashed with him as little as possible (after a first fruitless attempt at familiar friendship) and now confined herself to the respectful amusement of calling him names in his presence, in the certitude that he could not hear.

Whether he was thinking of business or had thought of business at all since he came to England this time, it would be impossible to discover. He was reserved where business was concerned. He took his Australian secretary about with him, a man whom he had trained to do his bidding as one trains an animal, and who, almost alone of the human race, knew exactly how to address him without emphasis, yet in such a tone as to be heard and understood. Now and then the banker would dictate—not every day—certain notes to this personage; for the rest the old man busied himself in a perpetual inquiry upon distances, the weather, population, and every conceivable kind of statistics. This morning, since the newspapers were beginning in a discreet way to get anxious about India, he was studying the map of that dependency.

When he had long so remained, with his bright old eyes bent on the page, looking keenly and closely at the foreign names and comparing them with the newspaper which had been left before him, the two young men decided upon their next occupation. They rose listlessly and sauntered

out. He did not so much as turn his head to look after them. He made a few notes upon the back of an envelope with a pencil, measured distances upon the scale, and, having satisfied himself upon this the last of his daily novel interests, he shuffled out again, his curious old face fixed in an ironic smile which was native to him, and which sprang from no knowledge of the political moment and of its necessities.

The servants cleared the table, leaving the great atlas where it was, for they were in terror of moving anything of his without special orders ; and when Victoria Mosel and Mary Smith came back into the room they found it still there lying open, with the vast shape of India asking them questions as it lay. Behind them, coming in from their walk, came Dolly and Pongo, both more anxious than either of them had been in the morning, but both more clear as to their common plan because they knew that the crisis had come. It had been decided that Dolly was to go up to town that night, not to wait. He was to see the Duke of Battersea on the morrow at the latest, and Pongo was to follow at his leisure.

Meanwhile the change of plans had to be told to Mary. They found her leaning over the atlas with Victoria, making out the names which the newspaper had given that morning. Dolly showed them the centre of the last disturbance

and the area of the famine. He showed them the narrowing triangle between the rivers where the relief works had been proposed, and then he showed them where the line of hills marked the peril of which they had vaguely heard.

"It does seem silly," said Victoria, "for the people with the famine all the way down there to make these other people up there begin fighting."

"Perhaps they haven't anything to do with it," ventured Mary Smith, looking closely at the meaningless page.

"It's about 300 miles," said the Leader of the Opposition, finding nothing more interesting to say.

As he said it he put his thumb down upon the famine area, his forefinger upon the centre of most of the anxiety in the hills, to indicate the distance.

"That's about 300 miles," he said again—not that they wanted to know. Finding the remark received so coldly he took up his hand again, and where his thumb and his finger had pressed upon the page, they had left two smudges.

Mary Smith shut the atlas and bore it away.

CHAPTER III

“ . . . and prayed his foot at last
Might leave its impress on the silent moss
In full contentment.”

YOUNG.

MARGARET DE VILLON was the daughter of a nobleman, French by extraction and distinguished in various ways.

The Baron de Villon, as he courageously chose to call himself, had naturalised forty years ago when his daughter was but a baby. He had lived in London ever since, and the great firm, the English branch of which he directed, regarded him in all their international transactions as an Englishman. As an Englishman he was also accepted by London in general and by politicians in particular, though he still preserved traces of his native accent, especially in the pronunciation of the letter s. He was not one of those men who attach themselves profoundly to any particular country, either in their habits or in their affections. He had travelled too much and he had seen too much of men to have preserved any such melodramatic

enthusiasms, but he had far too much self-respect to deny his native country or to pose as anything other than what he was by origin ; the memories of his youth, however, and the rising value of the site, induced him to cling to the old Castle of Villon on the Charente, one of the noblest monuments of the French Renaissance ; a possession of which any man might well be proud.

He visited it but rarely. With a generosity which is common to men of his position, he had thrown it open to the public, and the small fee that was charged to visitors went principally to the upkeep of the fabric. He had himself been born there, and when the day came for him to part with it to a wealthy Brazilian the wrench was severe.

Familiar and dear as the place was to him, however, it had not been for many generations an appanage of his family's. His father, M. de Rouviers, took that title from his own natal place, the Castle of Rouviers in the Belgian Ardennes, a property which he had sold when the Paris branch of the Brussels bank having grown to outshadow the parent house, the De Rouviers family had emigrated *en masse* and settled down upon the brilliant Court of Napoleon III. which, until the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, they supported with the utmost

zeal. But it should not be forgotten, for it explains much of Margaret de Villon's character, and therefore of the action of this tale, that the family ultimately hailed from Amsterdam, where M. de Rouviers' father, Margaret's grandfather, a Dutch gentleman of the name of Kahn, inherited a sound old diamond-cutting business in the Zwanenburger-Straat. The house is still pointed out to the curious and is heavily insured.

It is not our custom in this country to distinguish between the family name and the territorial title of foreign noblemen. As "De Villon" they were accepted, and De Villon they remained. But it is a fine index of the Baron's sterling qualities that he never dropped the foreign preposition before his name, though that name might so easily have passed for English had he chosen to spell it without the *particule*.

Marguerite, the Baron's only daughter in this country, was a woman of thirty, still unmarried, when Dolly, then in Opposition, had, to the very great surprise of the world, but by no means to the surprise of his intimates, ventured to make her his wife.

There was thirty years between them, and a difference—a superficial difference at least—in character and appearance which made all save

those who knew him best regard the experiment as hazardous.

He was what my readers know him to be : a tall, almost an emaciated, man of sixty-six, careful of his habits, somewhat stooping in gait, short-sighted, with scanty hair now white, and with that curious mobility of the lips even in silence which betrayed a nature sensitive to the point of nervousness.

She was a strong, upstanding woman, with the large nose and lips, coal-black hair and long brilliant eyes of the Franco-Dutch type ; features which, as they grew pronounced after her thirtieth year, added to the impression of power which she gave. Her ability to wear without ostentation great masses of jewellery, and the comparative loudness of her voice, were attributed by her friends to her French origin ; it was perhaps her Dutch which accounted for the rapid decision of her gestures and her full comprehension of that very large circle of friends which she dominated in the society of London.

The dainty foreign name of Marguerite which she had acquired in early childhood suited her as ill as the English endearment "Peggy," which had replaced it while she was still a girl. But Peggy she was and remained, and those who desired to boast an acquaintance

which they were very far from enjoying, increased the fashion by always alluding to her under that name. It crept even into those journals which affect familiarity with the Great. In political conversation it was universal.

Her father, though his business relations with the Prime Minister had been close and intimate, had never accepted a peerage. He had died some few months before the marriage, leaving his daughter as considerable a part of his great fortune as the arrangements of the banking house permitted; and it was generally said by those who knew him best that Dolly, for some domestic reason, had not chosen to cement his alliance with the family until the banker, who might possibly have objected to a political marriage, had passed away.

It was, as Dolly himself must have felt, an experiment, but it had thoroughly succeeded. Fond as his wife was of foreign travel, and eager as were her friends and relatives throughout Europe to receive her, she would often spend the most important weeks of the political year in London either at Battersea House or with her husband himself. Her money, of which she had retained complete control, was always at his service, and while so late a union forbade slanderous tongues to say that she had "made" her husband, it is certain that this considerable

accession of wealth added something to the strength of the Opposition during the four years of that political exile. Dolly had come back to power with a sense of security which is everything in political life, and which as his age advanced was especially necessary to him. It was touching to see with what zeal this woman, who had hitherto professed an indifference to party, threw herself into her husband's cause. Before her marriage Battersea House had been a second home for her, and she might have seemed the adopted daughter of the great financier who was her father's most intimate friend. It was the Duchess through whom this intimacy had arisen. That old and dignified but careworn woman had felt a great blank in the life of London. Unlike her husband, she had never been able to mould herself to the English language or the conventions of English life. The sudden death of her son by a fall from horseback at the head of his Yeomanry in the Potteries would have killed her had not Peggy, who was already a near and a dear friend, been with her night and day during that terrible time. Since that moment it was difficult to say whether it was through the Batterseas or through her own vigorous and delightful character that Peggy's entry into the society of London lay. With the Batterseas came Mary

Smith, and with Mary Smith, of course, Dolly; and Mary Smith (though no one would believe it) decided, on the Baron's death, that the match should take place. There is the simple story of Dolly's marriage.

Now she was enthroned as the leader of the whole political world; not because she was the Prime Minister's wife—she had, with the rare and beautiful self-sacrifice of women, married him just before he had arranged with Pongo to go into Opposition—but because among the women who were relatives or wives of the chief politicians of the time she was so much the most intelligent.

The Leader of the other Front Bench was a bachelor, but the greater part of his colleagues and of Dolly's had owed their advancement to connections which Peggy herself had arranged. She feared no serious rival. In the complete happiness of her married life there was but one little flaw: it did not broaden, but, on the other hand, it did not close. Briefly, it was this: Peggy trusted her own political judgment more thoroughly than she did her husband.

The vigour natural to her years, and still more natural to the Franco-Dutch temperament of the Khans, made it impossible for a man of his nurture to bring to a crisis a conflict of opinion which was always present and

which sometimes gave him the gravest misgivings. So far his dexterity, practised in forty long years of Parliamentary life, had proved too much for her over-rapid and sometimes violent decisions. In one thing, moreover, he was compelled to admit that she had proved herself supremely wise.

It was in the elections of 1918, when the National party after four years of Opposition stood to lose once more through their bungling upon the Broadening of the Streets Bill, that Peggy had discovered the "Straights."

She had not invented them, far from it; she had not even given them the nickname by which they were now popularly known and had become a force in the State. The Straights were simply something that was bound to come: they were a body of pure Collectivists, trained in the career of municipal Socialism, hungry for work, crammed with detailed knowledge, but for all that unswerving in their political theory. It was a pure accident that half of them were not women. They stood for Socialism as the plain Socialist of the numerous Socialist societies up and down the country had always understood the word; they stood for the nationalisation of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange. From a little fanatical group which had broken off in 1914, they had

grown by mere weight of conviction combined with industry to be the most powerful, though the smallest, party in the House ; and though their numbers were so far but just over fifty, they occupied something of the position which the Irish had occupied in the old days when they still sat at Westminster.

It was never known how the Straights would vote, but it was always known why they voted ; and the fear of that solid disciplined vote, cast ruthlessly and at a moment's notice in one scale or the other, made them, what I have called them, the chief political force at Westminster from 1918 onwards.

Their strength in debate was perhaps even greater than the voting power their discipline and logic gave them. There was hardly one practical question coming up before the House of Commons which some spokesman of the Straights could not get up and discuss with a knowledge and a lucidity which left his colleagues very uncomfortable indeed. They knew more about railway management than the railway directors, more about the conditions of labour in any trade than the old paid secretaries of unions who were returned to defend that trade, and infinitely more about colonial experiments in land than any of the Squires. They had not disdained a thorough study of the Services,

and one of the most striking debates in the session of 1916 was that which arose on a hot June evening after Malcolm, hitherto one of the least remarked of their remarkable body, had held the House for an hour with a complete proof of the overwhelming strategic advantages of Heligoland, a thorough description of the equipment of that island, and an unforgettable summary of the rôle it was destined to play in any future war in which the German Empire might be involved. He was careful to show how impossible the recovery of that territory now was for any foreign fleet, and concluded by pointing out what it might have been in the hands of Great Britain did it still happen to lie (as it did not) in those hands. Never was a closer or more valuable speech delivered. He concluded by insisting upon the emptiness and sham of the whole debate, which he had prolonged for exactly sixty-seven minutes.

When, therefore, I say that Peggy had discovered the Straights, I mean neither that she had made them nor that she had introduced them to the popular eye. They were not of the sort whom she would meet in people's houses; they were almost without exception active professional men, doctors, lawyers, and, in a still larger proportion, journalists, while the excep-

tions were the young heirs of millions fresh from the universities whom the Collectivist doctrine has always attracted.

No, Peggy had neither made nor introduced the Straights, but politically she had discovered them. She saw how and why they would support the National party in the elections of 1918; she persuaded—persuasion is too strong a word, she asked—the Batterseas to let her support them—since money was their perpetual trouble. She made up to them; she captured their leading spirit; she strengthened all their sinews of war, and that not in the amount needed, but in threefold or fourfold the amount needed. She did the thing largely; she got four of the six great leagues, and even the new and hitherto ridiculed Anti-Bullfighting League, to support their candidates, and everywhere she turned in their favour those currents, especially those financial currents, which might have been dissipated in lesser efforts or have been wasted upon one or the other of the two great parties.

The result might seem, to those who know little of the game, insufficient. It was, as a fact, enormous.

The Straights returned to Westminster after the election of 1918 only twenty-three seats stronger than they had left; their total muster

roll was seventy-four; but those seventy-four were in part to mould and always to support the National party. They were willing and quite sincerely willing to support the general programme of armament and of Imperial policy for which the National party now stood.

The Premier (for Dolly was Premier now by their support) was, on his side, not only willing as a politician, but naturally inclined as a thinker to follow their advice upon the details of social reform. It seemed an unbreakable arrangement, and it was further strengthened by judicious patronage.

One of the Straights, a Doctor Lambton, a curious, lean, fiery-eyed man of fifty with a straggling beard and a pushed-in face, was put at the head of the new Research Department, at £1200 a year—and nobody could have been fitter. The by-election was not even contested. In the penumbra of the Straights, among the men who voted with them but did not obey the party Whips,* Peggy chose two for Under-Secretaries. When the Straights hesitated at accepting a Fellow of Trinity on account of the difficulty of his attendance, she worked Trinity, and his tutorship was continued without the burden and distraction of pupils. In every way she made the Straights

* Mr. Moss and Professor Cheasly.

the instrument they had become of her husband's continued success ; and her husband, for all his doubts of her political wisdom, could never forget this capital point in her favour.

She had put Stoup in the Cabinet, and Stoup was never sober ; it was a scandal. She had tried to get a foreign Ambassador recalled whose presence in London was personally and vitally necessary to Dolly's policy ; and she had given Constantinople to a fool in spite of the persistent and even angry pressure of old Battersea who had almost quarrelled with her upon the appointment. She had done a hundred silly and impetuous things—but she had discovered the Straights ; and a more supple, elastic, and serviceable auxiliary no Prime Minister ever yet found below the gangway.

Now, after four years of unbroken success, four years during which the moral much more than the numerical power of her husband's government had impressed the country, there was a moment's trouble. It had come, of course, like all the pestilent little troubles of the last few years, from India.

It had begun with a famine, one of those normally recurrent Indian famines which are really of very little importance to any one save possibly the natives affected. On this

particular one not a single question had been asked in the House of Commons. That was some months ago. But the famine had increased largely (it must be feared through the work of agitators) and then a very bad local outbreak of plague had come to complicate the wretched business.

Everything that could be done was done. When the House had risen and when the interference of busybodies was no longer possible, the Secretary of State for India had accepted an embassy and had been replaced by a man whose close connection with the opium trade, and a very large fortune gathered in other forms of Eastern commerce, entitled him to confidence and respect. In the district actually affected the population was easily governed and of course unarmed. Less than a dozen isolated assassinations, and perhaps fifty attempts, most of these against middle-class officials, were not sufficient to cause any anxiety at home. But with the meeting of the House it was certain that a violent criticism would begin: the Opposition papers had already raised the humanitarian whine: and right on the top of all the other troubles came the beginnings of that business upon the North-West frontier: for *that* a loan was imperatively necessary.

Such was the political situation at the open-

ing of that week before Whitsun, 1925, when Dolly had returned to London to approach the Duke of Battersea upon the flotation.

The moment Dolly reached his room in London on the Monday afternoon he took up the telephone and asked Eddie, his secretary, to ring up the clerk downstairs and to call Battersea House.

What great events from little causes spring ! Hardly had Dolly put the receiver on its rest again when he heard in the passage a familiar contralto voice, rich but not subdued, and he had occasion to change his mind. He picked up the telephone quickly, begged Eddie to ring up the clerk and tell him he didn't want Battersea House ; but, alas, the clerk had already got that mansion, and in its hall a superb man of vast size and leisurely movement, dressed like a prince in a fairy-tale, had sauntered to the great keyboard and had languidly answered the call. When he heard the voice of the telephone man at the Prime Minister's telling him he was not wanted after all, he said in a gentlemanly manner : " Damn ! " put his instrument down and sauntered as leisurely back again to his chair.

All that for nothing. The rich but not subdued contralto voice had warned Dolly of his fate. As drowning men see pass before them

their whole lives in a flash (only they don't!) so Dolly imagined one hundred possible people who might be accompanying that rich contralto. Ten to one it was one of the Straights. He was certain it was one of the Straights. His certitude was justified; he had hardly formed that conclusion when his wife swept into the room, and the first thing she said was, "I've got Moss with me."

Her energy was more impressive than ever after the comparative quiet of Habberton, and Dolly felt not shorter indeed, but thinner, as he sat limply in his chair and looked at her. She wore no jewellery that day; only a great pendant of cloisonné enamel in the Byzantine manner, which hung round her neck by a small golden chain: a striking ornament, but her stature and carriage, the convex vigour of her face, and her dense dark hair excused it. Her hat also was enormous, and she was instinct with command. She smiled, as Dolly thought, triumphantly, but by way of greeting she told him again that Moss had come with her.

"Where is he?" asked Dolly.

"He's in with Eddie next door. He's one of the Straights Whips."

"Oh, I know that," said Dolly. "Good heavens, Peggy, I wish you wouldn't do these things! Sit down, Peggy, do sit down. I

haven't seen you for months. Why did you bring Moss? It's really very silly of you, Peggy. You oughtn't to bring Moss here. Everybody who comes into this house is seen! . . . I'm not dealing with the Straights," he said pettishly. "Besides which, one doesn't see the Whip—one sees the leader of the party."

"I'm the leader of the party," said Peggy radiantly and absolutely refusing to sit down. There are women whom a large hat makes larger, and Peggy was one of them. "You're very provoking, Dolly," she said in a voice a little louder than that she had used in the corridor.

"Where is Moss?" asked Dolly feebly.

"I've told you already, he's with Eddie."

"It really is frightfully silly," said poor Dolly.

"Moss says there's going to be a dissolution," was Peggy's answer to *that*.

"Look here," said Dolly, concentrating, "you don't understand." He clasped his hands and worked his fingers in and out, avoiding her face. "You really don't understand, Peggy. You've only been back in England a few hours. There mustn't be a dissolution."

"It's the very moment for one," said Peggy determinedly. "Mamma told me so."

"Your mother," said Dolly, as nearly angry

as he dared to be, "lives in Paris, and I won't hear what she's got to say, so there!"

"But Dolly," said Peggy, "Mr. Moss says they can force a dissolution . . . and the Duke thinks there'll be one too."

Dolly set his lips, drew them down into the shape popularly known as the horseshoe, and quizzed her.

"Let 'em," said Dolly. Then he looked up and saw a dangerous light in his wife's eyes. He sighed and said: "I suppose we must ask him in." He picked up the telephone again and asked Eddie to ring up the clerk downstairs and to tell him to ring up the housekeeper's room and to send up some tea—and when he had done that to bring Mr. Moss in.

The door between the secretary's room and his own opened, and Eddie came in with Mr. Moss, who was perfectly at his ease.

Mr. Moss was the very opposite of what too many voters in the suburbs who had learned to dread the name of Socialist might have imagined.

Before entering politics he had pursued the career of an auctioneer, in which he had learned the necessity of good garments—especially boots—and the advantage of a ready address. He talked if anything a little too much, and a little too quickly, but he could talk upon most

subjects, and he did so during the taking of that tea in the Prime Minister's room. The only other person who talked was Peggy, and Eddie thought, as he watched them, how like they were in a way, in spite of the great space between them in social experience and in a knowledge of the world. Perhaps the likeness did not occur to Dolly, but even Dolly felt an ill ease in the presence of Moss which was vaguely cousin to that which he felt in the presence of his wife.

Meanwhile Mr. Moss talked cheerfully on, praising the China tea, decrying the Indian, ridiculing the architecture of the new Fisheries Department, doubting the genuineness of the Corot which had just been bought by the authorities, and so forth. He talked all the time and he said nothing that could wound or offend. He did not go within a hundred miles of any political thing.

As a man crouched in a cave which has been invaded by beasts of prey will watch their eyes and bethink himself of some plan for escape, so did Dolly watch those two, not knowing when either of them would spring, although so far they had spared him. Then to his infinite relief the telephone bell rang in Eddie's room, Eddie went out to it, and before you could say "knife," Dolly had picked up his own

receiver and was talking. Mr. Moss had the bad manners to begin a new sentence to him. Dolly politely put up his hand and went on talking into the machine. Alas! he was practising deceit! He was pretending to have received a message.

"Certainly," he said to nobody at the other end of the wire, nodding his head, "certainly."

Eddie returned and asked if he should take the receiver. The Prime Minister shook his head and whispered, "Stop here! Don't go away! He can't nobble me if you stop!"

Then he pretended to listen again to the voice in the instrument. "Certainly!" he went on into the telephone, in that hesitating, refined tone of his. "Certainly! Yes . . . I'll come at once." This said without giving his wife and Moss time to edge in a word, he added to his secretary, "Don't mind me, Eddie, the wires were crossed." And with this meaningless but sufficient phrase, he jammed the receiver down again, jumped up smiling, took his hat, and said: "I'm very sorry, Mr. Moss, but that means I must go at once, as you hear."

Mr. Moss had *not* heard and he was not taken in. He had worked that trick himself in his time . . . with creditors . . . and he was pretty angry.

“ Won't you come too, Peggy ? ” said Dolly to his wife as he moved towards the door.

“ Yes, ” said Peggy decisively : she wanted to give him a very straight talking to.

Mr. Moss was angrier than ever, but Eddie, whose genius it was to understand his chief, led the Reformer off to talk earnestly upon most unimportant affairs, and to give the Prime Minister a good start. Thus was that dangerous interview strangled in its birth, and thus did Dolly evade the perilous cross-questioning of an ally.

Dolly hurried downstairs. He got Peggy out into the street. He walked down Whitehall at full speed, his great wife keeping up by his side, her temper very rapidly rising. As they crossed the Horse Guards she said :

“ How could you ! ” To which Dolly only answered by asking her whether they could both dine with the Batterseas that evening and alone ? He had saved himself from a desperate situation for the moment, but it might come again at any hour next day. He must see the Duke at once, and then he could breathe freely.

Peggy was a little bewildered at his sudden eagerness. “ Yes, ” she said, forgetting her anger. “ They're alone to-night. I'll tell them. ”

They separated, and he went off to his club.

Then the reaction which comes after great dangers just escaped fell upon the Prime Minister, and he suffered from a great depression until nearly seven ; at that hour he sent for his clothes and his man, and began very leisurely to dress.

His next business was the redoubtable interview with the Duke, but between that time and this would come dinner and plenty of wine. It was his consolation to dwell upon both.

CHAPTER IV

“ Though we must not pay to relics any overweening or extravagant reverence, yet they serve to remind us of the virtues and sweetness of the dead man, as of his humility, his despising of riches, his thoughts fixed upon God alone, and his contempt of this world ; and they have about them also an operative virtue.”—Commentary on Suarez’ “Theology,” viii. § 17 (Duncan’s Tr.).

G. QUINLAN SMITH, that aged man of gold, had a hobby.

His fortune enabled him to satisfy it to the full.

He loved to collect objects connected with the life of the late Disraeli, once Prime Minister of England ; lest such a taste should disturb the reader’s fancy I will trace it to its origin, which lay in one small incident of Mr. Smith’s early unknown travels, in the days when he was worth, perhaps, not more than twenty-five millions of dollars.

G. Quinlan, coming once into the French town of Cherbourg, upon the steam-packet which had brought him from America, had marvelled at the squalor of the Gauls. Everything in the place (where the steamer spent

some three hours before proceeding to more civilised shores) was repugnant to his sense of decency and order, nor could he conceive why the signs over the shops should be in such diverse tongues, nor why, as it seemed, there were no well-dressed gentlemen in the streets.

In the depression of soul caused by such surroundings, his eye lighted at seeing in his native tongue a sign "English schpoken" upon a shop window, and walking into that shop he was as much astonished as delighted to discover that the little place was kept by an old man who, for all his frousty loquacity and familiarity of manner, was still able to pronounce a few words of broken English. Mr. Smith took refuge in that shop from the barbarism round him as a man takes refuge under a roof out of the rain. It was a curiosity shop; and, since he felt that he could hardly leave it without making some purchase, he courteously asked the proprietor to show him some of the objects he had for sale.

There were many: there was a bullet, said to date from the Revolutionary Wars; three or four old plates with mottoes of the Monarchy upon them, a stuffed cat, one or two greasy books, more than a hundred snuff-boxes of various periods, and among other things an illuminated address presented to Disraeli by the Lodge of

Mutual Understanding in Cherbourg on the occasion of the commemoration of its foundation in the 15th of Nisán, in the year A.M. 5639. It was marked 50 francs, and George Quinlan Smith was really annoyed at having to deal in retail with a system of currency which induced yet another confusion. Dollars and pounds were enough in all conscience—and he had no clerk at hand.

However, he was still in the vigour of his age; he made a rapid calculation in his head, and thought that ten dollars was not too much to pay for a genuine relic of so august a personage. Just as he was coming to this decision a doubt crept over his naturally cautious mind.

“ Why didn’t Disraeli keep it ? ” he asked.

“ He noh kip,” answered the old Frenchman vivaciously, nodding his head to show that he thoroughly understood. “ Noh ! he no kip—he gif aweh ! ”

G. Quinlan Smith was annoyed ; “ But, I say, *why* didn’t he keep it ? ” he repeated.

“ He noh kip ! ” reiterated the Frenchman with Gallic enthusiasm, greatly fearing that his customer took the thing for a forgery. “ He gif back ! ”

It was at this moment that a tout, hired at an infinitesimal wage for this purpose, sauntered in and asked in his native tongue (for he was a

drifting Englishman who lived by such expedients) whether the shop still had the illuminated address which had been offered to Disraeli by the Lodge of Mutual Understanding.

“Precisely,” said the shopman, “I negotiate.”

The tout made a show of annoyance, sauntered out again, and Mr. Smith bought. The document was false, and it was the beginning of his collection.

That collection had grown with years ; it now took up so considerable a space that even the choice specimens of it filled two large rooms of his house in Maine, while the great bulk had to be stored in an annex to the British Museum, especially constructed at the National expense. There it was exhibited, not only for the instruction of the gaping crowd, but also in order that it might be warmed, dried, insured, cleaned, judged, valued, advertised, and guarded at the charges of the British taxpayer. He was constantly adding to it. Autographs he was chary of—they were too common—but playing cards, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, chairs, travelling rugs, masonic insignia, the services with which Disraeli had been served in railway stations, knives and forks, therefore, cups and saucers and plates, coal-scuttles, the hoofs of certain favourite horses and the tails of others, ink-pots, gilt wreaths, and bottles of hair-dye ; every conceivable object

which was germane to his collection he bought most eagerly.

He had two sources of supply ; he would (carefully concealing his identity, for he was terrified at the thought of the prices he would be asked if he were known) visit shops or private owners in person, and bargain for the coveted object ; and again he was furnished at much higher prices by those organised companies of dexterous men who are ready at the risk of imprisonment to remove property of this kind from foolish and unworthy owners, and to convey it to the millionaire, who can at least make a worthier and nobler use of it.

With these last—need I say it ?—he had no direct relations. He disdained them and their methods ; he would have nothing to do with things that did not concern him. He was a business man, and to mind his own business had been the leading principle of his life ; but when he received notice, private notice, that a seller—no matter whom—was possessed—no matter how—of an article he had spotted as connected with Disraeli, why G. Quinlan saw no reason why he should not buy.

* * *

Battersea House, as all the world knows, occupies the bottom of St. James's Street where the gateway to St. James's Palace used to stand

until it was pulled down under the Broadening of the Streets Bill.

My readers will not forget the Duke of Battersea's generous movement to help the Government and give the scheme a start. His immediate purchase of the derelict site and his building of the massive but graceful pile which now dwarfs every other building in the neighbourhood (including the Automobile Club) was the saving of the measure. The inner ring of public opinion knew very well that he had done this largely as a favour to Peggy, and to Peggy's newly wedded husband, but that opinion was ready enough to forgive him, for if there was a touch of jobbery about the business, it was amply repaid by the splendid stone façade which had replaced the dingy bricks of the old Royal Palace.

As Peggy was walking away after leaving her husband at Charing Cross, back to her room in Battersea House, it occurred to her that a little silver jug of which she was particularly fond had been for a long time mending at Pickles' in Suffolk Place. Pickles' might still be open. She strode across the broad of Cockspur Street and made for Pickles', heeling like some big cutter in an easy breeze and (as you would have sworn !) making the motor traffic divert to left and right, so fearlessly did she neglect it. When she got in

to Pickles' she saw something so astonishing that it made her forget her jug.

There stood, arguing over the counter, voluble and vivacious, a little figure that she surely knew! It was dressed in an overcoat rather heavy for the season, with a great collar turned up, and a bowler hat just showing above it—it was bargaining or protesting or both.

Behind the counter of the shop a young man, still suave, but on the point of exasperation, was assuring that little figure that something or other was not to be had. Peggy had not seen Mr. Quinlan Smith more than half a dozen times in her life; she had only been in the same house with him once for more than twenty-four hours, and that was during his last visit to England when he was stopping, as he invariably did, at historic but cosy Habberton. She remembered vaguely certain things about him, chiefly, of course, his gigantic wealth. She had half forgotten his deafness, and with that extremely open way of hers which all the world had noted, she took him by his aged left shoulder and swung him round.

"Mr. Smith!" she said. She saw the face above the collar, the keen old face, and the unmistakable eyes. He was holding, marvellous to tell (but the passion of a collector will account for anything!) an ear-trumpet, a distinct and very conspicuous ear-trumpet, in his right hand.

The moment he felt her hand upon his shoulder he slipped the surgical horror rapidly into the right-hand pocket of his coat, and, looking up at her towering above him during ten good seconds he was speechless. For once in his life the innumerable millions were genuinely taken aback. Then he snarled, a thing he hadn't done since the original days of his more moderate wealth :

“Nonsense!” he said. “Nonsense!” And without another word he twisted away from her and darted out of the shop.

Peggy was more alarmed than amused. “That *was* Mr. Smith, wasn't it?” she said to the young shopman, who on perceiving his new customer changed the whole attitude of his face and body from one of polite but wearied protest to one of plain grovel.

“No, ma'am,” he said. “No, my Lady, I mean—ma'am, I should say—I should say I don't think so. Mr. Kew, ma'am, a very deaf gentleman. I'm sure I didn't know that he was a friend of yours. I'm sure, ma'am, that if . . .”

“He doesn't seem to be a friend of mine,” said the rich, but not subdued, contralto with a laugh that filled the shop, rattled the glass badly, and made the old silver ring.

“No, ma'am, I thought not, ma'am,” said the young shopman. “He's exceedingly deaf, ma'am. Do you happen to know, ma'am,” he

continued with some hesitation, for he knew he was being very bold, "do you happen to know, ma'am, well, whether he really is good for . . ."

"Really," said his customer impatiently, "I don't know. It seems I don't even know him."

"No, ma'am, certainly not, ma'am," said the shopman, carefully putting away a bowl of Charles II. work with a hole in it.

"Was he buying that?" said Peggy.

"Oh no, ma'am," said the shopman. "I don't know that I ought to say, but he wanted to . . . Well," the young man tittered, "he wanted by rights to buy something," and here he lowered his voice to an awful tone, "something the *Duke's* got, ma'am—if you'll believe me, ma'am!"

"Something the Duke of Battersea has?" shouted Peggy incredulously.

"Yes, ma'am, certainly, ma'am, in a manner of speaking," said the young shopman more nervously than ever. "It's a spoon, ma'am, in the Riviera. We bought the plate, ma'am, when Mr. Boulger sold his villa to his Grace."

"Yes, yes," said Peggy impatiently.

"Well, ma'am, Mr. Kew thinks we bought the Disraeli Spoon, ma'am."

"What on earth's that?" said Peggy.

The young shopman was genuinely astonished at her ignorance.

“Why, ma’am, really, the Disraeli Spoon, the Disraeli *Rat-tail* Spoon.”

“Oh, I don’t understand a word you say,” answered Peggy with the full strength of her lungs.

“But I assure you, ma’am, we haven’t . . .” he began anxiously.

“Oh, who cares?” interrupted Peggy. “I’ve come about my jug!” And the poor young fellow, who was hoping she might tell the Duke the very important fact that Pickles had reverently let the spoon alone, was disappointed. He brought out the little jug, obsequiously suggesting that they should keep it a day or two as the handle wanted turning.

As usual!—Pickles hadn’t come up to time! . . . Peggy cursed them gently and sailed out.

CHAPTER V

“ I asked him once to let me have a little money—for a charitable purpose ; but he made so many damned conditions and reservations that I washed my hands of the fellow.”—“Reminiscences of the Duke of Wellington,” vol. iii. p. 168.

It was as Dolly had expected ; there was plenty of wine at the Duke of Battersea’s that night, and since he had to go through with a difficult business he was glad of it.

There was nobody at dinner ; he was very welcome—Peggy’s husband was always welcome there ; and things went so well in the three languages of their conversation that Dolly’s brain got clearer and clearer and his determination more and more fixed as the meal proceeded.

When it was over, when Peggy and the dear old lady who was almost her foster-mother had gone out of the room, and when Dolly and the Duke of Battersea were alone, he approached the great subject.

It was not pleasant, but it had to be done, and with the first few sentences he felt a movement of relief, both from the fact that he had at last

got to work, and from the fact that he was with friends. He had had enough of negotiations ; he wanted a little plain talk. So he talked plainly.

It was Dolly's habit to avoid other people's eyes ; he talked to the table-cloth ; he told the Duke of Battersea much that the Duke of Battersea did not know about the worry for the Indian loan, and he told him some things that the Duke of Battersea did know—and knew more about than he !

As he came to the heart of the business there grew upon him an uncomfortable feeling that he was being watched. . . . He could not define the feeling to himself and he did not like to lift his face. He went on talking a little more rapidly, but the feeling at last grew almost insupportable ; he looked up at last as he finished a sentence, and then—then he saw something very unpleasant. The Duke of Battersea had changed.

He had known the old man for years and years ; he had known him as plain Mr. Barnet, he had known him as Lord Lambeth. It was Dolly's own cousin when *he* was Prime Minister who had given the Duke the title he now held. . . . Dolly remembered the jokes about it at home. He had tolerated, and in his intimacy had often ridiculed the old man ; now that he was the

suitor things were singularly different ; when he looked up and saw that change in the financier's manner he was shocked.

It was not that the Duke of Battersea's attitude was more constrained, or that any definable expression had appeared upon his features. There was nothing easy to describe—but such as it was it was tremendous—and Dolly did not like it. Other men besides Dolly had been conscious of that something. They had come across it in more than one of the capitals of Europe. They were constrained to remember it and to hate it in silence—but they remembered it. To Dolly it was new, and, I repeat, it was unpleasant to a degree. His words became insignificant, and then dropped and murmured till he became wholly silent. He crossed his long legs with an assumed ease and poured out some wine for himself. He was not conscious of the way in which his mouth was moving and twisting.

The Duke of Battersea began to speak, he spoke in the tone and with the accent with which Dolly had grown so familiar in hundreds of conversations ; but there was something to-night behind the accent and the tone.

The Duke of Battersea opened with a little lecture. The idiom was not quite perfect—it never was—but the meaning was clear enough. The Duke of Battersea was quite ready, perfectly

ready. He was good enough to be ready to help the British Government, and Dolly felt instinctively as the repeated word "Zo" came out with emphasis, and as twice the Duke put a fat hand on the table to conclude some point as though he were crushing an objection he had done with, and were ready to brush it away—Dolly was aware, as the Duke so spoke and acted, that this last, this essential, private, obvious bit of work was not to be so simple and domestic an affair after all. It was business. It was business here in this familiar house as much as all the other accursed negotiations had been business during that anxious month.

"There iss my brodher Chames . . . You know Chames? Well, he would no doubt not say as I say . . . my brodher Chames . . . and his sohn also. Well! Each most know!"

The phrases followed each other, all the possible objections came out in due order. There was a careful insistence upon the caution any individual firm must exercise. One allusion after another (none directly stated) to the gradual decline of the borrowing power of the Government; an anecdote of something the Duke had heard in the City; then a mention—no more than a mention—of Benson's failure in Paris.

Benson! . . . of course, people like the

Batterseas knew all that sort of thing the moment after it had happened, but still . . . it was a shock to Dolly ; and the Duke spoke of it quietly, as though Benson's interview had taken place in his own office.

It may have been Dolly's nerves, but he thought he detected a little note of sneering patronage, and he looked up with one of those rare glances of decision and anger which, seeing what his position was, had never failed when he used them to check a veiled opponent. It had no more effect upon the Duke of Battersea than the cries of the newspaper man outside. The Great Leader continued his tale, his lecture, undisturbed ; still bringing down his fat hand at the conclusion of each objection, crushing an invisible something beneath that fat hand and brushing it away.

He was particular and even detailed in his history of the fall of British credit ; he reminded Dolly of the prehistoric Goschen conversion, of the thirty millions that were going to be advanced after the South African War—and never were. There was a suspicion of a smile upon his thick lip as he rolled that sum over in his mouth. He reminded Dolly of the days when Consols were at 92, and were believed to have touched bed-rock. . .

All that was ancient history, but the Duke saw

fit to bring it in. Then he spoke evenly of the Budget of 1909 and of Consols at 80. What a price 80 seemed then! . . . They were ten below that now. 70 had become the Rubicon in the popular mind. . . Credit was a queer thing! It looked illimitable, and then . . . why! it had a way of collapsing suddenly. . . . And the investing public was a queer thing! There was a hair's-breadth between full confidence and panic.

What a dull lecture it was, except for the man who was listening!

Perhaps it was for fear it might be too dull that the Duke laid an imperceptible emphasis on the favour he was doing, and that he spoke tenderly of Peggy—as though he would do anything to oblige Peggy.

His mouth was not insolent, still less his words, but his tone was masterful, and he meant it to be. It was the Duke of Battersea's way of doing that particular kind of business. It occurred to Dolly confusedly as he heard, that the Duke of Battersea bore a very different aspect according to whether one happened to be above or below him. The Prime Minister felt his own thin nostrils swelling and his own mobile mouth coming to an unnatural rest as those other thick nostrils and fat mouth greased on. He kept his teeth tight shut as he listened; then, in a pause of

that financial exposition he sighed slightly and took more wine. Had the Duke of Battersea been of Dolly's race he might have understood that little sigh—but he wasn't. It seemed to give him fresh wind, and he devoted the second part of his careful, even, modulated survey of the Indian Loan to conditions ; to those accursed conditions !

Dolly said nothing.

The Duke of Battersea felt no misgivings ; he was not of a breed that has misgivings ; only when he judged deliberately within his mind that it was time for his visitor to speak did he ask a question : “There are the works for the relief of famine ? ”

Dolly said “ Yes.”

Then the Duke of Battersea pointed out how these would fit in with his proposal ; the works could be developed. There was nothing new in ear-marking a security ; every Government had done it in its time. Indeed, the exception was rather *not* to do it, when one was dealing with places out of Europe—and so forth.

The Duke of Battersea was not persuasive and he was not commanding, but he already talked about those relief works with a little touch of control in his voice, of quiet and not quite clean control as though the lender of money must ever be the master—even of a sovereign State,

and Dolly liked it less than ever. Then, at last, after so much clear business analysis of the situation, the Duke of Battersea permitted his surface to break into ripples ; his voice, in this last phase of it, reminded Dolly of a summer sea filmed with grease, dust and oil spilt from a steamer's side, beneath the iridescence of which ran too many small undulations—and the ordeal was over !

Dolly had not said anything except that "Yes." Of the relief works he had not uttered a sound.

The Duke of Battersea put his two fat hands upon the arms of his chair and gave a lift, but did not succeed in getting his body out of it. He was an old man and puffy. He sat down again with a look of effort and fatigue. Dolly was not young, but instinctively he came to the Duke's aid and put one hand underneath his elbow. The Duke made another effort and was on his feet. He shuffled to the door to open it. As Dolly went out in front of him the Duke took a liberty : he put his hand on Dolly's shoulder ; he almost patted it. Then, whether because the shoulder were not sufficiently responsive or no, he slid his hand off again and side by side with Dolly he waddled up the stairs.

As he went up those stairs the Duke of

Battersea was settled in his mind. He had secured the Indian Loan, and the commission appertaining thereunto.

He stopped upon the landing to take breath, and Dolly courteously stopped with him, peering with his weak eyes at a little red chalk drawing of Strang's that hung upon the wall. As the Duke of Battersea stopped there taking breath, his old usurer's heart continued to be glad within him. Things had not gone in the old supreme way well with him and his for a long time past—but he had got that Indian Loan!

He took the second flight with Dolly still silent by his side. At each of the few steps a new comfort entered the Duke's short survey of what had happened. The German branch had underwritten the Roumanian fiasco, and the French branch had made a hopeless muddle of the Garonne Canal. The New York house had only just been saved by an amalgamation, and his worthless nephew there was on a salary. But *he* had got the Indian Loan—and the commission appertaining thereunto. What was much better, infinitely better, he had got his grip on the relief works. He knew the House of Commons. The works could be made permanent. Therefore on a security that would develop: he would know how to manage *that*.

It would recoup him for the failure of the Anapootra Ruby Mines and for the public insult he had suffered and had with such difficulty stifled in the Press.

The Duke of Battersea was at the top of the stairs and his little calculation was over.

By his side Dolly, as silent as he, raged inwardly.

He was ready for a great sacrifice. He had had worry enough, God knows! And the absurd Demaine, his hopeless Chancellor, was ready for anything by this time, short of chucking himself into the Thames; and even that would have been a poor solution, for Demaine could swim.

Yes, Dolly was ready for almost anything, but there is something illogical in anger, and Dolly, whether from the wine or from the length of that monologue, or (as he believed) from the nature of the pressure he had just felt, was angry. Sixty-six is late in life for a man to become a man, and the mood of anger will not last long at such an age. But Dolly was certainly extremely angry. He said good night almost at once to the poor old Duchess; he told Peggy he should be late. The man rang up his motor and he went off in the darkness of it, full of an odd desire for action, a mood he had not felt for perhaps thirty years. As

he drove through the night he meditated strange plans.

It is not often that a statesman has to think really hard, but Dolly was thinking as hard that night as a hare when the coursing begins. After five minutes of that thinking Dolly did what so many had done before him in a crux—he told the man to drive to Mary Smith's, and he thanked what was left of his gods that she sat up till two. It was a very little way to Mary Smith's house in Mayfair, but Dolly had time in those few minutes to taste in his heart things that Englishmen of his generation had never yet tasted, and the bitterness of a certain cup. Leaders of every other people in Christendom save his had drunk deep of that cup at one time or another. He was being bullied: his country was being bullied by the money-lenders.

There was a certain hand—oh, he began to know the very shape of it now and the very curl of its fat fingers!—there was a certain hand which held the stem of the chalice: it had been forced to his lips and he had sipped it—the savour of it was terrible!

He felt his face getting hot in the darkness of the car as the thought recurred to him.

He had never thought of England save as the ally and even the contemptuous ally of the

forces that were now opposed to him. He had watched with indifference the intermarriage of the great families with these swine ; for a few seconds Dolly was almost a fanatic, and he said half aloud, to himself : “ Damn the brute ! ” Then, luckily for him—for his nerves were never strong—the brakes girded and he was at Mary’s door, and a moment afterwards with her alone.

He told her the whole thing.

He told her the gravity of the position, the necessity for an immediate loan, the unexpected difficulties that had come in the raising of it, and last of all in a jerky voice which made her look up at him twice curiously, he told her what had just passed with old Battersea.

Mary Smith looked extremely grave. She crossed her hands behind her knees and leaned forward, staring at the fire.

“ You mustn’t quarrel with the Batterseas,” she said in a low tone.

“ I know that,” said Dolly, pulling up his long body from the chair and walking to the end of the little room and back again.

Mary Smith pondered. “ It will be unpleasant for them,” she said, “ if I manage it for you anywhere else ; and there *must* be *some* sort of a row ! ”

“ If you can manage what, Mary ? ” he asked

almost eagerly, stopping in his pacing up and down.

“ I’ll tell you in a minute,” she mused ; then she added suddenly, looking over her shoulder at him : “ Did you pass your word ? ”

“ No,” said Dolly.

“ Does he think you have ? ”

“ Oh yes, I dare say he thinks I have.” He sneered a little.

Mary Smith said what she had to say with decision :

“ I shall speak to G. Quinlan Smith : I shall speak myself ; he’s my husband’s uncle, Dolly, and I think he’ll do it.”

“ My dear girl ! ” said the Prime Minister, foreseeing some dreadful interference.

“ Don’t bother me,” said the dear girl, who was old enough to be a grandmother, “ you don’t understand. I’ll make him think he’s offering : he’ll understand better like that.”

Dolly’s instinct of negotiation was at once aroused. After all, he had spent forty years in intrigue.

“ Let me know when you’re . . . ”

“ I shall do it to-morrow, Dolly,” she said. “ There are a lot of people here to-morrow, and if you come I’ll tell you. It’ll be all right.”

And with that she said she was determined to go to bed, and she sent him off as well. It was not quite three in the morning of Tuesday. On the Wednesday Parliament was to rise for Whitsuntide.

CHAPTER VI

“ But since mine outward ear of sense now void
Forbids me converse and the natural play
Of human speech reciprocal, do thou
Creator of both ears, to workings new
Mine inward ear attune ! till in his course
His awful part he plays ; and that first ear
Corporeal be not earthly fulfilled
In his great Second, which can Heavenly sound
And true accords enjoy.”

MILTON.

THE next night, Tuesday night, was the last before the adjournment.

Mary Smith's rooms were very full ; and one of that hot and uncomfortable crowd was more important by far than any other to Mary Smith ; that one was the aged uncle of her former spouse. She looked forward (as she found him standing rather solitary and apart) to a sharp, unpleasant and necessary task, for G. Quinlan Smith not only suffered, as the reader knows, from an extreme deafness, but also and most actively from the spiritual infirmity which forbade him to admit it. It was necessary to shout at the top of one's voice into the financier's ear, remarks which were intended for that ear alone ; and, what was

more, if in doing so one betrayed the slightest effort, his keen little bright brown eyes at once distinguished the strain, and it was enough to spoil your chances for ever if he thought that you had perceived his weakness.

She led him into a little room of hers apart from the rest ; it was constructed for her own comfort with double doors, for she was sensitive to noise. She led the old gentleman half coquettishly by the hand toward the fireplace. He was pleased with the attention from a woman younger than himself by more than twenty-five years, and he was ready to hear anything she might have to say. It was some months since Mr. Smith had been upon this side of the Atlantic. His deafness, she judged from his inattention to the loudest noises in the street and from the fact that he had but narrowly escaped death at the hands of a hooting car, had grown perceptibly worse since she had last set eyes on him. But she was a woman, and she was brave, and she smiled splendidly before she opened fire. She had already pleased him by her manner ; to attain her object she had made herself a little more tender and a little less respectful to him than was her wont. The old gentleman sat with his head a trifle bent towards her as she looked into the fire : she began at the top of her voice but with no per-

ceptible change in the arrangements of her features :

“ *Uncle !* ”

His face was so impassive that she could be almost certain he had not heard. It was a risk to begin again, however. She patted the old shrivelled hand, yellow and claw-like, which lay upon her knee ; for a moment she felt an odd sense of contrast between her hearty self and this spare, close figure in its very old-fashioned black, and with the narrow open V of an evening waistcoat that never changed in shape. Then she took another shot after a deep breath :

“ UNCLE ! ”

The window shook and there was a long note drawn from a very delicate Venetian glass upon a table at her side.

G. Quinlan Smith made answer : “ Yes, dear ? ”

Mary Smith was no longer young, and it was a strain. She filled herself with another good breath and again without contortions bellowed : “ There’s something I want to say to you—quite between us.”

“ Quite ! ” said Mr. Smith, nodding, “ quite ! ” He had not caught the last two words but he was pleased with her that night and he would not scold,

“ You know about this Indian business ? ” she roared again, still with that wonderful control over her face.

“ Never met him,” whinnied the old man, “ never met him, my dear ! ” He patted her knee familiarly, and she had the marvellous restraint to stroke that hand again. Then she launched another : “ It’s about India, uncle.”

“ Oh, yes,” he murmured, “ I was there last year, dear.”

That opened a way for her to go on. She nodded vigorously, shouting, “ Yes, yes: . . . You’ve heard about the trouble ? ” She remembered the map at Habberton.

G. Quinlan Smith had heard about the trouble.

She waited a little while to make quite sure what she was going to shout next.

“ Dolly says there’ll have to be a loan.”

“ Well, *let* him leave it,” said the old man, smiling, “ so far as I’m concerned.”

“ A loan ! ” she bawled, “ floating a loan ! ”

There are things that survive the decay of the senses, so deeply are they embedded in the soul, and I verily believe had Mary Smith but whispered the phrase, that sacred verb “ to float ” would have pierced through the choked avenues of the old man’s senses. It was wonderful to see how even his bright eyes grew brighter and how alert his wizened face became under

the stimulus. He gabbled quite rapidly, nodding at her sideways at every third word :

“ Oh, then, they'd better come to us ! Mary, they'd better come to us ! Is that it ? ”

Mary Smith nodded sweetly with her lips shut, which saved her larynx.

“ It can't be done like this, Mary,” he went on as rapidly as before—“ not our way of doing business, eh ? ” He giggled as much as to say that it was supremely his way of doing business. He belonged too much to an older world ; the courteous world of the 'sixties in the Northern States, to demonstrate more vigorously ; but his whole attitude was as good as a wink or a dig in the ribs, and Mary Smith was delighted. She took an unfair advantage of his good humour, and his old age, and the direction of his eyes which were staring into the fire. She fumbled on the table at her side, and a little behind her for the push of a bell, and when the servant knocked she pretended to be disturbed, but she was able to say to that servant in a tone which the old man was bound to miss :

“ Tell the Prime Minister that I want to see him before he goes.”

Then, when the servant had shut the door behind him, and when she heard the outer door shut as well, she shouted again at her uncle :

“ I’ve just been sent for. I’ll come back.”

She looked at him with infinite tenderness, and kissed his bony forehead and was gone. But as she in her turn closed the outer doors behind her, the fatigue of that experience was plainly apparent upon her face. It is not a light thing for a woman of her age to have to carry on such a conversation. She went from one of her rooms to another, a little too hurriedly perhaps, until she saw Dolly standing near an open window talking eagerly, or rather disputing, with a foreign artist who was not a gentleman—but the Prime Minister was interested in foreign art. She hooked him away.

“ It’s all right, Dolly ! ”

“ What’s all right ? ” said Dolly, a little bewildered.

“ Smith and Fischer’ll do it ! ”

“ Oh ! ” said the Prime Minister blankly, then with a sudden look of intelligence : “ Oh yes, I remember. Well, thank God for that ! ” he said really relieved. “ It wasn’t my business really,” he said spitefully. “ Why, my dear Mary, thirty years ago a Chancellor of the Exchequer would no more have let his work . . . ”

“ Oh yes,” said Mary Smith impatiently—the strain of those few minutes had thoroughly fatigued her. “ We know all about that !

Anyhow that's the point. Smith and Fischer will *do it*, and you ought to say thank you."

"I do thank you, Mary," said Dolly humbly.

"I know uncle!" said Mary a little bitterly. "He changes his silly old mind three times a day. He just happened to fall right to-night. He doesn't know of conditions and he hasn't thought of conditions. And if you get at him before he goes to the office to-morrow, it'll all be fixed up—plumb."

A look of terror came into the Prime Minister's eyes. He remembered the last conversation he had tried to maintain with the aged G. Quinlan. *That* had been about badger-hunting, and the old man happened to have been in an extremely bad temper; he would have it that there were no such animals as badgers, which word (he was free to maintain) was only an English term for skunk. The memory of that argument carried on at the top of his voice at a public dinner in the City, while he was suffering from a severe cold, was a nightmare to the Prime Minister, and he remembered having felt for the first time in his life the bitterness that separates great differences of fortune. For George Quinlan Smith was worth any number of million pounds, or dollars, and controlled, one way and another, twelve pounds (or dollars) for every one he owned, while the

Prime Minister had no more than the house in town and his private income, and his salary and the place in Yorkshire, and the pleasant little house near San Remo, which after all was only on a long lease, and his share in the undivided property of the Durham Mine and Horniman Park—all the rest was his wife's.

“Don't be silly, Dolly,” said Mary Smith wearily; “you bring your secretary to-morrow. The real one,” she added, “the one who writes the letters—and I'll see that uncle has his, and you talk it over after breakfast before he goes to the City.” She sighed profoundly. “He's got a sort of Marvel who makes him hear every word he says, and it sounds almost like ordinary talking, except that things rattle. Oh, Dolly, the Marvel has a horrible voice!” And Mary shuddered. “I think he's a colonial or something,” she said, screwing up her forehead and lifting her nostrils as people do when they taste something unexpectedly unpleasant in a mouthful of food.

There was a look on Dolly's face which suggested flight, and Mary Smith was very nearly angry. After all, she had taken a great deal of trouble for him, and it would be too bad if he shirked simply from boredom and a lack of initiative, or from that rooted habit of his

of lying in bed until one. "Of course, if you'd rather go back to the Batterseas," she said. . . .

"No," he said. "Oh! no! I am not going back to the Batterseas, Mary. I'll come tomorrow, and I'll bring Eddie."

She told him that he had done well and she praised him with her eyes. He, poor man, by no means out of the wood, kept on repeating within himself what a shame it was that *such* duties should fall upon *him*. His mind harped upon it as the man helped him on with his coat. He sauntered slowly through St. James's and across the Park, still worrying. It was not so very long ago that these things were done as though by a machine. He didn't even know *how* they were done. A loan! One was warned against it as an extravagance—but there was no question of anything else.

As he looked back over that life of his, and especially over the last fifteen years of it, it seemed to him as though with his own increasing years England herself had grown old, and as though all fixed things had changed.

Long ago people used to point out some piece of coarseness in public life or some toppling example of corruption as an index of how far things had gone. And here was another milestone: the man responsible for the govern-

ment of the Empire was huckstering and cringing for mercy like the chance and ephemeral dictator of some putrid little tropical State in difficulties !

When he was a young man, before he was forty, there were your Consols, and there was your loan. Or rather, there wasn't your loan, he mused bitterly. It was all paying *back*. . . . And now one had to scrape and shift. . . . It would be a perfect cataclysm if anything went wrong ! Why, the permanent officials, the Treasury, in those days would have known twenty times more about it than he—and now he had to hide it from his own secretary until the very last stage was reached.

He went over those months again in his mind. The first decisions in which the simplicity of the thing was taken for granted : everything left to the permanent officials, and nothing bothering him but the way in which he should silence the fools in the House of Commons and explain the magnitude of the loan. Then the first difficulties, then the negotiations with Paris, and the hitch, the letters that came to him personally, and his first attempts to grapple personally with the trouble. Then all the private visits and conversations which he cursed in his heart ; one rebuff after another, where his predecessors would simply have had to speak

and the thing would have been done. And last of all, that scene at the Battersea's.

He was glad that Mary Smith had nobbled her uncle! . . .

He stopped on the bridge in St. James's Park and looked down into the shallow sheet of water, balancing these things in his mind as a man does when he has accepted the least of many evils. . . . After all, it *was* the least. The old man was deaf and cranky and sometimes offensive, but he was Mary Smith's uncle and Dolly knew the kind of way he would set to work. G. Quinlan Smith did things or did not do them; and if he had said he would do this he would do it. There would be no conditions or driving of hard bargains, and, by God, he would have old Battersea grinning on the other side of his ugly old mouth! There would be no conditions or hard bargaining with Smith . . . no relief works and ear-marking, no tying of his hands! No ear-marking of the debt! That was essential—for Heaven only knew how the trouble in India would develop!

He went over the whole circle of these thoughts two or three times in the remaining three or four hundred yards of his journey, and they occupied him in the wakeful moments of that night.

As for the Duke of Battersea, he lay in Batter-

sea House not yet asleep. He was feeding internally and nourishing his soul upon Dolly and the Indian Loan. He held Dolly between his spatulated forefinger and his gross thumb. But then he did not understand blood which was not his own, nor what sympathies might arise between men of one race and one society ; and he had forgotten G. Quinlan Smith, that brittle, aged man.

CHAPTER VII

“ Si peccas, pecca fortiter.”

MARTIN LUTHER.

“ Those who lay down their lives in the infancy of a science or an art through their devotion to its development may more properly be called *martyrs* than the fanatics whom hysteria prompts to hideous self-sacrifice, and even self-mutilation, in honour of some imaginary and unknowable object of adoration.”

THE DAILY PRESS.

ON that part of the coast of the Mediterranean where the piercing cold of the Provençal winter is perhaps less acutely felt than in other portions of the region, a villa known by the original and beautiful name of Les Charmettes stood overlooking the inland sea.

Nice was not far distant, Beaulieu was right before ; and the delightful gardens with their palms and their carpets of flowers stretched down the steep hill-side in terraces. It had during the last thirty years been in turn the property of the Heines, the Polignacs, and the Boulgers of Northampton, and was in shape a large parallelopiped, white with green shutters and a gilded cornice ; it was fifty-seven metres long, twenty-six metres high, and fifteen

metres across. It was surrounded by gravel and there were many stables.

Upon the failure of the Boulgers in the oil slump, the Duke of Battersea had come into possession of the place by arrangement and had given it its present name. It was not a large house as the palaces go which adorn that coast, but though the Duke was now too old to visit it save upon the rarest occasions, it was kept up in all its old magnificence.

Among other things which distinguished Les Charmettes from other private houses in that famous neighbourhood was this: that the furniture and every detail in the appointment of the house had been kept unchanged for something like thirty years.

The Duke of Battersea, when he had obliged the Boulgers by taking over the place after their trouble, had very properly insisted upon the retention of the visitors' book and the little nick-nacks, many of them of historic interest, which a less careful man would perhaps have abandoned to their former proprietors; and among these nick-nacks was a spoon which Mrs. Boulger had very carefully preserved, and of which I fear she felt the loss more than of any other of her treasures: it was a plain English silver teaspoon of what is known as the rat-tail type, one of a set of

thirty-six. Its interest lay in this, that when the Boulgers acquired the house from the Strauss branch of the Polignacs in 1912, the old *concierge*, a woman of immense loquacity, had, while showing the new proprietors over the house, picked up a sheaf of silver of all kinds and shown it to her new mistress, saying in a fluent Italian which Mrs. Boulger's daughter could both comprehend and translate, that when Disraeli had done the former proprietors the honour of accepting a cup of tea from them, *this* was the silver which had been set before him. The *concierge* could even pick out the spoon with which he had stirred the cup. To be accurate, the good woman had used for the purpose of her illustration a large tablespoon, but the error was so manifestly absurd that Mrs. Boulger corrected it. Nor did the repeated assurances of her English friends that Disraeli had never so much as approached the villa, shake Mrs. Boulger's faith in what was, after all, the living testimony of a reputable witness. She chose one of the rat-tail spoons which would most probably have done service upon the auspicious occasion, had engraved upon it the legend, "*This spoon was used by the late Earl of Beaconsfield to stir his cup on the occasion of his graciously accepting tea on his visit to 'Les Charmettes,' then the property of Jeremiah Boulger,*

Esq., J.P.,” and caused it to be enshrined in a delicate and lovely case of velvet and russia leather. This spoon the Duke of Battersea had not forgotten, but as his interest did not lie in that direction, he had not brought it to England: he left it with half a hundred other objects of interest under the care of the *concierge*.

It happened that in this September of the year 1925, MM. Arton and Bertot, with their companion, Mme. Yahzoff (a Lithuanian lady), were engaged upon what was now their annual tour in the south of France, in search of such objects of art and curiosities of every kind as might have a value to wealthy collectors. Among the first names upon their list of these was, as the reader may well imagine, that of G. Quinlan Smith, and since they had occasion to pass by Nice in order to acquire an old reliquary of Limoges enamel which was secreted in the safe of a neighbouring church, they saw no reason why they should not do a double stroke of business, and call at Les Charmettes before their visit to the sacred edifice: for, as luck would have it, Les Charmettes came first upon their road. They reached the villa at three o'clock in that same early morning just before the Whitsuntide Recess during which Mary Smith had successfully spoken to her uncle upon the Indian Loan.

The night was moonless, and, on the Riviera, overcast.

Driving—against all regulations—without lights, the three experts drew up their motor at some distance from the gate of the villa. Leaving Bertot, who was the more skilled in mechanical principles, with the car, M. Arton and Mme. Yahzoff entered by that door which they had instructed the *concierge* to leave open for them, and proceeded to cull with refinement, without excessive haste and above all in no great quantity, such objects as their trained judgment told them would most attract their clients. Many a large and garish ornament did they pass by with contempt as they promenaded the great rooms, candle in hand. But the Spoon they took, and a little miniature of the Prince Imperial as a child as well; Mme. Yahzoff scanning it curiously and telling her indifferent companion three or four names which occurred to her as likely purchasers for it. Beyond these, a book or two of the rarer sort, an exquisite little piece of mediæval embroidery, and one Chardin small enough to be easily carried under the cloak, were all they needed.

They left the house within half an hour of having entered it, they locked the door, and pushed the key under a particular flower-pot which had been indicated to them by the Duke's

aged domestic. This done, they regained their car. M. Bertot took the steering-wheel and the three of them sped off along the great road towards the church which it was next their intention to examine.

The rule that one should drive at night with lamps lit, just and reasonable as it is in the interest of the general public, is perhaps of equal importance to motorists themselves. Bertot, though he was an accomplished driver, struck, not two miles from Les Charmettes, the body of a large sow which, through the inexcusable negligence of her proprietor, lay asleep towards the right-hand side of the great highway. By daylight the accident might have been negligible. In the darkness it was otherwise. M. Bertot, in attempting to recover the car, gave the wheel too sharp a twist, and in a moment the whole contraption had swerved against the parapet wall. The bonnet telescoped up like an opera-hat, M. Arton was shot forward with his head against the stones of the wall upon one side, the Lithuanian lady flew with equal rapidity through the air upon the other. M. Bertot performed a much more singular *tour de force*. While his hand still clung to the steering-wheel, his legs and body performed a complete somersault; he tore his trousers and the skin of his left leg in the

wreckage, sprained one arm, but suffered no other damage.

He righted himself with his sound arm, painfully extricated his leg from the mass of broken metal, and listened. The engine had stopped dead. He smelt petrol poured out somewhere upon the ground. He heard a low groan. He bethought him of the danger of lights, but he none the less struck a match, shielded it with his hand and looked at the woman's face upon the grass. He did not care to look again. . . . The groan had not come from her. He heard that groan again; it was from Arton. Even as he heard it, and as he was about to strike another match, he distinguished upon the road behind, from the direction of the villa, a sound unmistakable to the trained ears of those who serve the great collectors of Europe and America. It was the double trot of the mounted French police who go in couples, and one of whose duties it is to raise, by their active interference, the risks of these great collectors, and therefore the value of the objects they seek.

M. Bertot thought no longer of who or what was groaning. He groped in the darkness for the bag: it was open and its contents were scattered. He felt rapidly for metal, clutched half a dozen objects which might be silver or

might be gold, stuffed them into the side pocket of his inner coat, slipped off the outer coat of hair, the goggles and the motoring-cap, and hobbled to the other side of the road.

He was not, as were or had been both poor M. Arton and poor Mme. Yahzoff, an expert in human psychology ; but he had a sufficient acquaintance with the police to make a fair guess at what would happen. The gendarmes had heard the noise of the wreck ; it would arrest them, and while they were examining it he would make directly for the hills above and hide through the day in the brushwood. When evening fell again he would find means to decamp, and if he knew anything of the ways of the police, he would be safe for days in the Paillon Valley beyond the hill.

When the aged Duke of Battersea heard by a telegram the next day of what had happened at Les Charmettes, the blow struck him with no violence so far as the loss was concerned : it struck him with little violence so far as the sense of insecurity which it involved was concerned. What did hit him and hit him hard was the luck. He was a very old man and his luck had now run steadily against him for quite fifteen years. In the last ten years it had run badly against him, and when he heard of his

loss, he was more than commonly gloomy for three days. He sent a telegram dismissing the *concierge*, and then to tell the truth regretted the half-crown, for the good woman had disappeared long before the wire reached Nice. He put in an advertisement for the miniature of the Prince Imperial, to which he was attached from a sentiment which he felt (in common with all his family) for royalty in any form. As to the Spoon, he did not give it another thought.

CHAPTER VIII

Q. Do you think French essential?

A. No—I should not say it was essential. German and Spanish are essential—but French is often useful.

(Report of Commission on Public School Education, II. 1728. Lord Willesden's evidence. Extract.)

LYING in bed, when that practice has been indulged in for forty years, is a habit which grows upon a man. At sixty-six it is not easy for any one, especially if he be burdened with affairs of State, to break with any custom long confirmed.

It was on this account that Dolly did not busy himself particularly to turn up at Mary Smith's at one o'clock of that next day.

If Mary Smith, for reasons of her own (or rather, for reasons of her uncle's), chose to lunch at such an hour as one, she must expect those of her guests who were not American millionaires to be a little late. It was a quarter to two before Dolly, taking things very easily, came sauntering up to her door.

But if the genteel practice of rising at one's leisure is suitable with the governing class of this country, no less consonant to the active com-

mercial brains of the New World is the tiresome trick of working in the early morning. And G. Quinlan Smith, after nearly seventy years so spent, could not keep his eyes shut after six o'clock.

At this absurd hour in the morning of that same day he had dressed himself, without the aid of a man, in his rusty but dapper little clothes, he had boiled his own shaving water on a spirit-lamp, and poured some part of it upon the coffee essence which he kept beside him in a cup, with a cracker or two to help it down; long before eight he had put his secretary through his paces.

When the first post came everything was ready for dealing with it; by nine his work for the day was accomplished.

The old man looked forward to a sharp little walk in the Park: on his way back from it he would look into some shop in pursuit of his eternal quest, and he would be back for luncheon.

He was back a little before one, for his habits were exceedingly regular, and he did not tolerate a moment's delay in his midday meal. As one servant helped him off with his coat, another handed him a telegram that had arrived for him that morning. It told him, in the French tongue, that a lady was in the possession of the

Spoon and would board the afternoon express of the day after the morrow at Villefranche. It was signed "Parseval."

Mr. Smith had received many such telegrams in many languages during the past few years; he had received several since he had been staying with his niece and had given her private address to his various agents. He could translate "Parseval" into "Bertot," but the rest of the wire puzzled him—and it was not the kind of wire on which he made confidences even to his secretary. With a muttered regret that he could not live to see Anglo-Saxon the universal language of the world, the old gentleman went straight to the library, pulled down a French dictionary and discovered that "cuillère" meant spoon. That threw a flood of light upon the subject. He became keen. The next two words, barbaric though they were, sufficiently resembled words in the English tongue for him to understand them. He gathered that the *Spoon* was out and offered, and that Bertot would meet him—or rather a lady in the train would—but "*Villefranche*" bunkered him. . . . He turned to "V" in the dictionary but it was not there. . . . it must be a technical word, but the technical dictionary was equally silent. Perhaps it was a code word? . . . For a moment he imagined it to be a significant warning. . . .

He was gravely troubled. He put the telegram in his pocket and waited for light: then he took it out again and fiddled with it. He began to get feverish, he was in a hurry; he had spotted "the day after to-morrow" and he wanted to know without being known. . . .

Some say that an exact concatenation of events proves Providence. These would be moved to believe that Providence in the year 1925 was concerned to ear-mark the Indian Loan, to embarrass the British Government, to handicap the North-Western Campaign—for the same Power which kept Dolly abed of a morning moved G. Quinlan far off and bore him to the Mediterranean Sea.

At lunch itself, as he inwardly fumed, at table and seated at his very side, Providence had planted the instrument of its designs. This instrument was a lady of fashion, Courier by name, in surface faded and in features not engaging. She was ignorant of the millionaire's infirmity, but lively indeed to his enormous wealth, and almost before he was properly seated she said in the low confidential tone which she had used since at least the first Jubilee:

"You don't know what a lovely place I've just come from!"

Mr. Smith looked at her and smiled gently

as one might look and smile at any other dumb show.

Mary Smith, who was fussing about at the head of the table, cried to her guest in the tone one uses to a railway porter when he is going off with luggage :

“ He’s deaf ! Shout ! ”

“ You don’t know what a lovely place I’ve just come from,” repeated the lady in a very loud tone. She felt herself blushing and she was most uncomfortable.

“ No no, Lily,” said Mary anxiously, “ shout ! Shout as though you wanted to stop a train ! ” For G. Quinlan still smiled a meaningless smile.

“ *You don’t know what a lovely place I’ve just come from,*” gave forth the victim in enormous tones, by this time as red as a beetroot.

“ Certainly,” said G. Quinlan politely, “ certainly,” and he went on eating.

“ *Oh ! such a mass of flowers !* ” roared on the unfortunate woman, vaguely aware, though her literary sense was weak, of the contrast between what she was saying and the way in which she was saying it . . . “ *It’s—it’s—it’s like a Palace of Spring !* ”

By this time there were tears in her eyes : it was a damned shame of Mary to have put her next to the old fool, and not to have told her ! The other people were, according to their powers

of self-restraint, looking at their plates or looking at her. Mary Smith valiantly began to babble, saying things that had no meaning, and through the babble could be heard the old gentleman's murmur, as with continued courtesy he asked: "Why not? Why not?" But like a horse that, deeply embedded, struggles through a bog and wins the farther shore, so, from very lack of restraint, was the poor lady stampeding and determined to win through and to find firm ground.

"*It's called Villefranche!*" she began—and at that word the old fellow's faculty for hearing what concerned him awoke. Had he had his ear-trumpet in his pocket I verily believe he would so far have forgotten his conventions as to have pulled it out. As it was he did not disdain to put up a curved hand to his right ear, to lean to his companion and say:

"Villefranche? Now that's very interesting! Who is he?"

"Do tell him, Mary," pleaded the poor woman.

And Mary Smith, who though farther off was better trained in the art, howled out:

"It's a place, uncle! It's not a person! It's a place!"

And her uncle's nod and the gleam in his eye told her that he had understood.

"Oh, it's a place, is it?" He began to

understand his wire. But his infinite caution recurred to him, and before he would find out where it was, he let a good deal of talk flow over the incident, and he spent the minutes in a little speech to his companion in which he said that he seemed to remember Villefranche and that it was on the Rhine.

The lady shook her head. "Not that one," she said, and whether he heard her or not he understood the gesture.

"It's near Monaco. You get to it before Monaco."

"*You get to it before Monaco,*" translated Mary Smith, interrupting much else that she was saying to the Foreign Office clerk at her side. "*Do you get to it before Monaco?*" she asked the said clerk anxiously.

"I dare say," said he politely. A bald man farther down the table, who motored, said Yes, you got to it before Monaco; he had seen it on a blue and white signboard. Then they talked about Monaco.

It was exactly twenty minutes past one, but the only person who knew the time or cared about it was G. Quinlan Smith. His little brown beads of eyes had noted the clock exactly; he would not give himself away by looking at his watch. And note you, when G. Quinlan was stopping with his niece all the

clocks marked the same time and that time was the right time. He saw to that. He paid a man to come in every morning from Dent's, and it was his delight to control the results; for method is the hinge of business.

The organising mind is distinguished for its grasp of detail, and G. Quinlan Smith could not only have told you, in spite of his age, the hour of the three main expresses to Chicago from the east, and that of the two best trains for Washington from the Jersey side: he could also tell you how to connect with the Sud Express, the Orient Express, and the Côte d'Azur from London. Very firmly fixed among the many hundred figures of such things which lay beautifully pigeon-holed in one of the corners of his brain, was the hour 2.20, which is the train for any true gentleman who wants to reach the Riviera before the service to the Riviera stops running.

G. Quinlan Smith took no further part in the conversation save to make himself as polite as possible to the lady upon his right, to save her the trouble of shouting by volunteering his own remarks on all manner of things, and throughout that little by-play he showed a careful indifference to Villefranche.

Three times before had he got exactly what he wanted, and not a soul had known. The

last time was so late as the last January : he had found the thing in Brighton ; a chair. The time before was two years ago, and he had marked down the quarry at Biarritz. *That* time he had been precisely three hours in front of a rival, and he remembered the triumph still. He calculated exactly all that he had to do.

At the half-hour he got up from the table : Mary Smith would not interrupt his movement though she waited for him to return. But G. Quinlan Smith was not in the habit of consulting other peoples' convenience when matters of real importance to himself might have suffered from too great a courtesy towards them.

"It's too bad of Dolly !" said Mary.

"He'll turn up in a minute," said the Foreign Office clerk, who knew his cousin's ways. The bald-headed gentleman who motored added, "He'll turn up a little before two."

The exhausted lady who had sat on G. Quinlan's right had a grievance.

"Is Mr. Smith coming back, Mary ?" she asked.

"I suppose so," said Mary indifferently, but she was really annoyed with Dolly. She had taken a great deal of trouble to get her uncle to meet him at lunch. However, she knew the old gentleman's ways, and even if the two could not meet at lunch she would arrange to

get them together again some time that day or that evening. She knew the extreme importance to Dolly of that meeting.

Upstairs in his room the aged G. Quinlan had written a short note: "Back Saturday. Tell no one as usual." He put it into an envelope, stuck it down, wrote his secretary's name outside, picked up a little bag which he could afford to keep ready packed, rung for a servant to take it downstairs, and took a taxi.

And he was off for Charing Cross in that convenient vehicle just as Dolly, with no precipitation, reached Mary Smith's door.

Dolly came in and there was a perceptible fuss, for after all he was the head of the State. He made himself pleasant; he ate and drank. He wondered why there was no Mr. Smith.

The meal was over, they began to break up; Dolly began to be alarmed. All he wanted to do was to make an appointment with the financier. The merest few words would have been enough. He asked Mary rapidly and alone, keeping her behind the others, where Mr. Smith was?

"I don't know," said Mary, "I suppose he's in his room. I'll ask. It's all your fault, Dolly—I said *one*."

The servant told them that Mr. Smith had gone off in a taxi.

“Where did he go to?” said Mary sharply.

The servant said that Mr. Smith hadn't given an order; he had told the taxi man himself. It was a bore!

“I ought to be back in my room by three,” said Dolly irresolutely.

“Very well,” said Mary Smith, worried and put out, “I'll work it later. I'll ring you up.”

“I'll be there all afternoon,” said Dolly, “in my room. Or at any rate they can fetch me.”

“Very well,” said Mary Smith again, “it was all your fault.”

So it was. By the time Dolly had read the two threatening letters that awaited him and sketched out his notes on a new investment, G. Quinlan was nearing Dover. While later on the Prime Minister was listening very closely to his Chancellor of the Exchequer's views upon nothing of importance, G. Quinlan Smith was taking a bowl of soup in the restaurant at the Gare Maritime of Calais; and when, after dinner, having waited in vain for a message from Mary, the Prime Minister rang her up to hear if there were a sign of news, G. Quinlan Smith was at the end of his elaborate instructions to the attendant who was preparing his bed in the sleeping-car of the Riviera Express.

CHAPTER IX

“Toreador, Toreador!”

BIZET (*Carmen*).

THE Leader of the Opposition, Pongo (to give him the name with which endearment and familiarity had christened him), was never quite at his ease. His years of experience in political life, now numerous, taught him indeed to expect certain kinds of experience, but had not even yet familiarised him with them. And one of his perpetual troubles was the reconciliation of the inside with the outside of Parliament.

It was his custom, when he found himself in any crisis (and these happened, oddly enough, at intervals of about three months) where he was doubtful about his course, to take a fair sheet of paper, stiff, heavy, and provided at the public expense, and to write down upon it in due order the points which he had to consider. Having done this he would look at his own writing for about half an hour in a hopeless sort of way. He believed that it helped him to think. Before questions, on the day after

G. Quinlan Smith's abrupt departure and the consequent increasing anxiety of Dolly, Pongo sat in his private room in the House of Commons setting down such heads upon such a sheet of paper, all in order. First he wrote :

“No division on Indian Loan.”

Then he wrote underneath it in a bold, firm hand.

“Discuss again.”

It always relieved him to gain time, even on paper.

When he had done this he waited a little, sucked the butt end of his fountain pen, and looked into a corner with one eye. Then he set down more deliberately,

“Debate on Indian Loan first Wednesday after Whitsun.”

“That's Wednesday week,” he thought to himself. Unnecessary as the calculation was, he counted carefully upon his fingers and made out six free days. “And three of 'em will be a week-end,” he thought.

He got nervous about the date for the meeting of Parliament after the Whitsuntide recess. It was Wednesday week he was pretty sure. He took up the newspaper which lay on his table and looked up the morning's news. There it was, sure enough: “It has been arranged that Parliament will meet again after the Whitsun-

tide recess on Wednesday the 3rd of June." He sat ruminating on *that* point, and unconsciously his eye wandered to the leading article.

Pongo was a simple man ; he had been born in those laborious middle classes whose wrath he still inwardly feared, and many of whose customs he still retained. But he was so far acclimatised to the Upper Air that he did not read leaders in newspapers.

When, therefore, Pongo's eye fell idly upon the leading article in the Chief Opposition Organ, *his* Organ, his dear supporter and shield-bearer in the Bloody Fray, it was falling idly upon an expression of opinion which all his principal supporters in London had absorbed that morning, and which thousands upon thousands of his rank-and-file had taken for gospel. He followed the first sentences of it mechanically, his mind really occupied upon what he should put down next upon his sheet of notes—when, to his horror, he saw that the second paragraph was taking a line of its own about the Indian Loan ! He forgot his notes, he almost forgot his own name, as he read that paragraph with gradually bristling hair.

“ Whether a definite sum shall be ear-marked for the relief of those who have suffered from this appalling Indian blunder on the part of the Government, it will be for the House of Commons

to decide. The fair fame of England is at stake, and we have no doubt that in a question like this which is surely above party, even the present Government will remember that we shall be judged not only in India but in Europe by our success in grappling with the famine and by the promptitude and vigour with which the relief works are undertaken.

“ What form those works should take is again a matter upon which we must hear the decision of the Government and the reception of it by Parliament before we can criticise or approve. But one thing is certain ; there is a majority in the House of Commons for immediate and practical action. Party considerations may lead various sections of the motley coalition which supports the present Government into the same lobby ; but one group—which we have had frequent occasion to criticise—will not disappoint the considered judgment of humane and civilised England. The Straights, it is understood (and the nickname is not ill-deserved), will refuse to vote for a loan which is not specifically allocated to relief works of a definite and scientifically organised type. We will do the PRIME MINISTER the justice to say that we believe he appreciates the gravity of the situation, but we cannot trust to him alone. He has proved himself too often a time-server and a

politician in the worst sense of the word for the Nation in such a crisis to trust to his unaided judgment or rather to his unaided initiative. Luckily we have an alert and well-disciplined Opposition, magnificently led by what is perhaps the ablest front bench since BURPHAM'S great Administration changed the face of England, and did all that epoch-making work in Committee upon the Broadening of the Streets Bill, which will be imperishably associated with his name. In Mr. PENNYBUNT we have just that solid British judgment touched with Celtic fire which is needed in the chief hour of such a crisis. Here at least there will be no weakness. The Opposition will see to it that leave to raise this loan shall not be granted until the Government has at least clearly pronounced itself upon its plan for the relief of distress in our great dependency."

Pongo had forgotten all about his notes ; he was beginning to sweat. " If they go on that tack much longer," he thought, " they'll raise a stampede in the party ! "

He read the paragraphs again, and was a little relieved at the second reading. After all it was guarded. The wild men who were talking of holding meetings about the famine would find the Chief Opposition Organ (damn its ugly cant) as insufficient as *he* found it rampant. He was still meditating whether he should arrange

a meeting with the editor of that precious sheet . . . or set the owner to dine with the Indian Secretary . . . or, better still, whether it wouldn't be better to lie low, when Eddie came in.

"I say," said Eddie, "Dolly wants to see you."

"All right," said Pongo, "there's been nothing on in the House, has there?"

"No," said Eddie, "and it wouldn't matter if there was." Eddie was distinctly nervous and in a hurry, and Mr. Pennybunt found himself following the Prime Minister's secretary through the corridors very much as though he were obeying an order. When he got to the Prime Minister's room he understood that there was plenty of cause for the excitement. He was told all that he needed to know. Battersea wouldn't work. The Prime Minister didn't choose to give details, but he wouldn't *do*, old Battersea wouldn't *do*; and the pressure was getting really serious.

"Isn't there any one else? Couldn't you go back and arrange with the Yid?" said poor Pongo; he didn't dare to say what he thought, which was first that Dolly was quarrelsome and peevish at times, and secondly that *he* would have worked old Battersea better.

"I'd got a man," said Dolly, "and we had the

whole thing almost arranged, and then the cursed fool bolted. At any rate he can't be found."

"Who was it?" said Pongo bewildered. Every possible water had been fished, he thought; if the old Peabody Yid had failed, or had begun bullying like the rest, or had his back put up, he could see no issue.

"Well," said Dolly reluctantly, "if you want to know, it was old Smith."

Pongo gave a sigh of relief. "Oh, that's all right," he said fervently. "Thank God for that!"

"No, but I told you," repeated Dolly with irritation, "the old fool's bolted!"

"How do you mean bolted?" asked Pongo, jumping up from his chair, hooking his hands at the end of his long arms into his trousers pockets, and standing with his little legs broad astraddle, facing Dolly in sudden alarm.

"What I say," repeated Dolly querulously, "bolted—can't be found—gone. I was to have met him at luncheon this morning, and he'd gone away."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Pongo, with less respect than he usually showed.

"I tell you he *has*," complained Dolly.

"But hang it all," said Pongo, "the old gentleman can't have gone off steeplechasing. We're

bound to find him. . . . There's damn little time," he added.

"Really, Pennybunt, I know that," snapped Dolly, almost angrily. "Little time? Why it's a matter of two days." When he was excited in this way his voice went up into a falsetto which was very painful, and he ended up the word "days" on a shriek.

"Well, you *got* to find him," said Pongo doggedly, "you *got* to find him."

Dolly was considering within himself what he should answer, when Eddie reappeared with a message.

The deputation had come. "What deputation?" asked Dolly, waving it away in the air with his hand. "Tell 'em to wait."

"The Anti-Bullfighting League," said Eddie; "it's on your paper."

The Prime Minister groaned. "Oh! The Toreadors!" he breathed.

"They can't see us both together," he added hopelessly to Pongo. "It wouldn't do, would it?"

"No," said Pongo decisively, "besides which, they're coming to see me afterwards. They say it's not a party matter"—and he smiled grimly.

"Tallant knows about it," said Dolly.

And Eddie told him that the Secretary for

Foreign Affairs was ready to come the moment he should be sent for.

“ Well, send 'em along,” said Dolly wearily. “ Look here, Pongo, go into Eddie's room and get out that way. They'll be on to you next.”

Tallant, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, a lawyer of distinction, and an authority upon Roman coins, came in.

“ You speak,” said Dolly.

“ Certainly,” said Tallant. “ They 'xpect me to.” He set himself sternly to the task, and the deputation was announced. Eddie introduced them by name.

The Prime Minister shook hands with Sir Robert Belcher, who had the safe seat in Leeds, he nodded to little Pilkington whom Belcher paid for at Norwich, and he patiently waited for what they had to say. He had heard it before—O Lord ! He had heard it before !

Sir Robert Belcher was not a terse man ; he loved words. He rolled them in his mouth, and he made twenty do the work of one. His speech was intolerably long ; and Dolly curiously recalled how every word of it had been recited to him for years past. The brutality of the Spanish people, the cause of enlightenment and justice, the terrible scenes of the bull-ring, the sufferings of dumb animals, especially of noble horses, came each in turn. But this time Sir

Robert Belcher ended a little differently. His peroration was new. It contained a very distinct hint that the Government was living upon sufferance, and that there were some things which certain of his followers would not stand. He did not wish to add to the Prime Minister's difficulties, but the very clear declaration which the Government had made through its Foreign Secretary eight weeks before had not been followed up. And, to put it plainly, the Anti-Bullfighting League were getting impatient.

Little Pilkington seconded. He aired his independence at large; and in a short speech which annoyed Dolly acutely he reminded Tallant of the famous phrase that, "If Bullfighting were not abolished before the new year, England must and would see justice done." The new year, he pointed out, in the deep and painful silence, was five months old. Had England moved? For himself he was not ashamed to confess he was an extremist. He was one of the six who had demanded a public apology to some selected Bull or Bulls, or, failing that, an ultimatum. But the stalwarts were willing, they were reluctantly willing, to compromise, so only *something* was done to stop the horror. Then he took a breath to nerve himself for the effort, and suggested the blockade of the Ebro.

Tallant answered in the suavest manner.

Nothing, he said, had shocked him during his tenure of office more deeply than the callousness of the Spanish Government in this regard. But he was sure the deputation must appreciate the extreme delicacy of the situation. Much was being done ; the negotiations with Madrid were almost completed, and meanwhile he would point out that the Ebro was not a navigable river. Moreover—it was not a thing he would have said in the House, he reminded them—the blockade of any European port or harbour was a very serious matter indeed. He did not say that under certain circumstances there might not be contingencies which might produce events whose consideration would under certain aspects not include active measures. We were still the strongest Power, by far the strongest Power in the world, and the two great armies at Aldershot and on Salisbury Plain were not gathered for nothing, but they must remember the delicacy . . .

When he had got so far there were murmurs in the mass of the deputation, and Tallant got nervous. Of course if nothing else were left to them they might have to contemplate so serious a step. . . . The deputation simmered down again. But surely it was premature. . . . The deputation started again to bubble. One moment . . . surely it was premature, just when

the negotiations with Madrid were upon the very eve of conclusion, to take violent action ?

The leader of the deputation thanked the Prime Minister masterfully and the Foreign Secretary coldly ; Pilkington added very directly that he hoped something would be done, and he would watch events. Then the group of men hustled out again. The Prime Minister and his Foreign Secretary could hear their loud and disappointed voices in the passage outside, and Belcher shepherding them as best he could towards Pongo's room.

“ Bloody fools ! ” said the Foreign Secretary.

“ Oh dear, yes, ” sighed Dolly, who was thinking of other things than bullfighting. He had no clear idea on which side of Spain the Ebro ran.

Meanwhile Pennybunt had received the deputation with open arms. He listened to those same identical speeches with a happy smile upon his swarthy face. He sat in his chair with his ridiculously short legs crossed (a difficult feat), the tips of his fingers together, an intelligent and sympathetic look in his half-closed eyes. He nodded in agreement with everything that was said, and when Pilkington had done his turn and spouted his piece, he stood up and took him by both hands.

“ My dear Mr. Pilkington, ” he said heartily,

“ we don't sit on the same side of the House, but there are some things which are above party ! As Englishmen, my dear Mr. Pilkington—merely as Englishmen . . . ” and here the Leader of the Opposition was too much moved to continue.

A strongly sympathetic whisper passed through the pack of idiots crowded into the little room. After a pause to master his manly heart, Pongo recovered himself and continued :

“ As you may well imagine, I have never seen a bullfight. I have some little interest in agricultural pursuits ; I *think*,” he continued roguishly, “ I *fear* I am that dreadful person a Squire ! ” (he wasn't, he was a solicitor, but no matter). “ I fancy,” he laughed, “ that those who are good enough to support me on my own side of the House ” (and he nodded genially to William Hake, a man with a face like a football, who was watching him with goggle eyes) “ have long ago forgiven me that little peccadillo.”

The deputation giggled genially. Here was a very different man from the arch-fiend Dolly and his supercilious and aristocratic Foreign Secretary ! Here was a true Englishman with a heart of gold, nay of oak, God's Englishman !

“ Of course,” went on Pennybunt, “ I am in a position of—chrn—more freedom and less responsibility ”—(“ Good phrase that,” whispered

Hake to the Mayor of his town, who stood next to him)—“than—er—a member of the Government could be. But who can tell, gentlemen,” he added with an arch grin, “we never know what the fortune of war may not bring: an election may be on us at any moment!—Um!”

Belcher looked grave, and Pilkington discreetly neutral, but several in the deputation nodded and smiled.

“We never know what the fortune of war may not bring; we who fought and bled with Burp-ham on many a hard contested field, are accustomed to find surprises in politics.” He grinned again. “And, er—there may be a time when . . . If that time ever comes, I need hardly say, gentlemen, I shall then be, as I now am, heartily with you, heartily.”

“We want to know . . .” began a little refined young man, a prig but well born, and therefore dangerous.

“The Bull, gentlemen,” broke in Pongo again, catching the youth’s eye, and striking his open left hand with his clenched right fist, “is our fellow-creature! We, who have known him in the English country-sides, feel, I do not say more strongly than our town-dwelling fellow-subjects, but we feel, if I may so express myself, more *intimately* in this matter. We have,” said Pongo, screwing up his face as though he were

looking for a word, "we have, as it were—er—a nearer acquaintance with the nature of the intolerable cruelties which you have determined to end."

"T'Bull," interrupted a very large, fat, bearded man from Wiltshire, with a prodigious voice, "t'bull, Mister Pennybunt, if I may make so bold, is as sensitive an onimal as ever youa'll faind!" He spread out his hands and interrogated the audience, who murmured their assent.

"Aye!" continued the fat, bearded man, warming to his work, and beginning a speech, "an' ef youa'll treat a bull youmainly and kaindly, why there's noon'll repay't more grateful, loike! I've seen soom on 'em with a reg'lar doonrate yuman look in their eyes, that I 'aäve! There's been a deal of change in this treatment of doomb onimals sin I were a boy! Wha-a-y! I c'ld tell you uns tales . . ."

Pongo interrupted rapidly, but smiling more immensely than ever with his long slit of a mouth and his champagne cork of a nose positively beaming genial sympathy:

"Quite so, quite so," he said. "We have one at home," he added rapidly, "on my little place" (he was lying away like a mill-race, but he was determined not to have speeches made to him) "that's a regular pet of the children. We call her Daisy. We ride on her back—at least the

children do. I can't bear to think of it, gentlemen, I mean of the Spanish gentlemen business—I mean of the Spanish business, gentlemen," he went on helter-skelter, speaking against time like a company firing at random in the last moments of a desperate resistance. "We must agitate, gentlemen! Agitate, agitate, agitate! And I am with you! We are working together in this, gentlemen! I am with you heart and soul!"

He sank all party differences, he took the astonished and rather pompous Belcher warmly by both hands, he captured the less reluctant Pilkington in the same way. The man from Wiltshire he tapped on the shoulder, and he had got rid of the delighted deputation before they quite knew what had happened.

As a politician, merely as a politician, Dolly was, perhaps, Pongo's superior; he could chisel the experts, and the very rich had been known to fear him—after all he had advantages. But politics is a very complicated game, and there were parts of that game in which Pongo knew his way about better than Dolly. Every man to his trade.

Outside in the passage as they went towards the lobby, Belcher said suddenly to Pilkington that they hadn't said a word about voting.

"That'll come," said Pilkington. He had a

better ear for the mob than his patron Beleher, and the mob, the deputation that was crowding behind them as they went toward the outer lobby, was plainly and manifestly delighted. The Opposition had gained at least eleven votes in that short interview, and through the eleven many thousands of others.

Meanwhile Pennybunt, left alone in his room, had in five minutes as completely forgotten these people as though they had never lived. He was waiting for Eddie, and he followed Eddie again into Dolly's room.

He found that statesman with his mind more or less made up. He had telephoned again to Mary; there was no sign of old Smith. Mary was perturbed. Dolly, though not yet desperate, was moved to that state of acute anxiety in which even a politician can be spurred to make a plan. He had his watch on the table, and a piece of paper before him on which he had drawn a few lines.

"Look here, Pongo," he said, "there's no division now, and the House won't meet until Wednesday.

"That's so," said Pongo colloquially, with a reminiscence of colonial travel.

"Well, in the interval we've got to fix it up with Smith, Fischer and Co."

"That's so," said Pongo again, cheerfully.

“Smith, Fischer and Co. is old Smith, neither more nor less.”

“That’s so,” said Pongo for the third time.

“Old Smith’s got to understand the thing and clinch it by the day after to-morrow.”

“Why?” said Pongo.

“Because of the week-end,” said Dolly contemptuously.

“Oh, of course,” said Pongo humbly.

“House meets on Wednesday and the loan’s the first business—must be.”

“Quite so,” said Pongo. “When d’you closure?”

“Same night,” said Dolly with an unusually vigorous snap.

“Oh, I say!” said Pongo.

“Can’t help that,” said Dolly firmly. “We mustn’t allow time for a stampede. They can’t get up an excitement during the Whitsuntide holidays, and they won’t; but if we go and have a full-dress debate and take three days about it, and perhaps carry it on to the week after, God only knows what may happen!”

“They’re easier to manage if you tire them out,” said Pongo doubtfully.

“Oh yes, I know all about that,” sniffed Dolly, brushing the suggestion aside. “It all depends on what you’ve got to *do!* If *this* thing runs away with us, it’ll run away with us

in the Press; and that's got to be *stopped*." Dolly struck his fist down on the desk with a little determined gesture such as a child might have used.

"Very well," sighed Pongo resignedly, "you closure at once . . . but we shall have to vote against the closure, you know."

"Nonsense!" said Dolly, shaking his head impatiently. "Your declaration about urgency and gravity of news and interest of the nation and the rest of it will come before closure."

"Oh, of course!" said Pongo, humble again, "I forgot."

"Well, don't forget," said the ill-tempered Dolly, who was suffering from the strain. "The truth is I don't think we shall have to closure. They'll all get silent and solemn. You get up about half-past ten and make it really hot. The House'll be full then and you can stop 'em dead. But you must be there to watch 'em before that. You don't want Eddie to give you any briefing, do you?"

"N-no," said Pongo, considering, "I think I've got enough to use. There was an assassination only this morning," he added in the tone of a man who remembers something to the point.

"Of course," said Dolly, "if there is any real fighting in the Hills before then there'll be no trouble at all in the House."

“None!” said Pongo decisively, “but you can’t guarantee *that* . . . and they don’t respond to the old sort of bogey telegrams, even if they’re drafted at the India Office and marked ‘Peshawar’ . . . the public wants battles.”

Then in came Eddie, pestering them again with the news that Mr. Moss wanted to see the Prime Minister.

“Send him in,” said Dolly savagely, and the impeccable Moss appeared.

He was in the same clothes as Dolly had noted and hated in Downing Street the day before. Dolly could have sworn he slept in them if they hadn’t been so neat. The little man seemed made with his clothes on. Then he reflected that Mr. Moss must have taken them off because the crease down the shins of the trousers was so strong.

Mr. Moss took a chair and put his hands upon his knees; he was full of assurance.

“I just met the bull-fighters in the passage,” he said with his unfailing smile.

“Well,” said Dolly with a nervous laugh, “I don’t know how you people feel about bull-fighting . . .”

“Oh, *I’ve* never fought a bull,” said Mr. Moss, looking straight out of a window—“cruel work I call it.”

“The debate of Foreign Affairs isn’t coming

on just yet," said Dolly, in the tone of a man who is keeping his end up, and with a savage note in his voice. I don't suppose *you've* come to see me about bull-fighting ? "

"Oh no," said Mr. Moss, still smiling. "It's not coming on yet . . . but some of 'em seem pretty sick . . . however, I haven't come about that . . . as you say ! " He was looking out of the window over the brilliantly lit streets of the London night, but his eyes were not fixed upon the traffic, the lights, or the blurred darkness of the houses ; they were fixed upon an empty piece of sky ; neither they nor his thick smiling lips moved.

"Well, Mr. Moss ? " said Pennybunt.

"Well, the fact is," said Moss, carefully ignoring Pongo and looking and talking right at Dolly, while he moved his hands up and down upon his knees, "the fact is our fellows aren't comfortable about India. They're not *comfortable*," he repeated as though the word were a sort of carefully chosen talisman.

"Nobody is," said Dolly grimly.

"No," said Pongo by way of corroboration.

"Yes, but," said Moss, his smile not changing by a tittle and still refusing a glance at Pongo, "they're not comfortable. And to tell you the truth, Mr. Pennybunt, we look to you ! " And as Moss used that astounding

phrase, he swivelled on his chair, turned his shining face, still with the fixed smile upon it, right round and looked bang at Pongo.

Pongo did not drop his eyes, but he dropped his lids even lower than usual.

“Really,” said Dolly, “this is extremely unusual, Mr. Moss!”

“Well,” said Mr. Moss unperturbed, “I don’t say it would have oc-curred twenty years ago. In fact,” he added thoughtfully, “it *wouldn’t* have oc-curred twenty years ago! Perhaps twenty years ago we three shouldn’t have been in one room—or whoever was the leaders so to speak then. But it’s oc-curring now.” He removed his eyes slowly from Pongo’s face and fixed them upon the patch of nightly sky outside.

“I should have imagined, Mr. Moss,” said Dolly, almost rising from his chair, “that when you took the trouble to come to *my* room, you had come to talk to *me*.”

“So I did,” said Mr. Moss with complete assurance. “But I did find Mr. Pennybunt here, didn’t I? And it’s all one, anyhow! I must say what I’ve got to say: and I’ve said it. Said it to *you*. We aren’t comfortable on this Indian business.” Here he turned his face slowly again till it shone full on the Prime Minister, who began to hate him in his heart.

“ We’d a mind to tell you this yesterday, and that’s why I came to you yesterday when your good lady brought me. But you wouldn’t let me get in a word edgeways ! ” ended Mr. Moss.

Dolly remembered that torrent of talk, but he also remembered how he had checkmated the talker, and he smiled within himself.

“ Besides which, ” continued Mr. Moss, “ we want to be treated as man and man ! ” There was a careful querulousness in his tone which Dolly knew from old experience to be the preparation of a bargain. “ Now I’ve told you, and I tell you here now, that we’re not *comfortable* about this Indian business ! ”

“ Of course, ” said Dolly after a little pause, “ your votes are your own, Mr. Moss. The party for whom you speak will do me the justice of saying that I’ve never interfered and I haven’t even parleyed. ”

“ That’s fair, ” said Mr. Moss judiciously. “ That’s right ! And we haven’t worried *you* either. ” Then he added, nodding at Pongo, who sat quite silent : “ Mr. Pennybunt, we’re not comfortable about this Indian business. ”

“ Mr. Moss, ” said Dolly at last, for his mood was now all for action, “ I must tell you quite plainly, it is your duty and the duty of your party to vote as you think best for the country. We’re going to bring the loan up on Wednesday ;

and highly as we think of you we shall think more highly of you still if we know that you are acting as your conscience prompts you. And . . .” added Dolly, with a forced sincerity in his voice, “and the country will think so too, Mr. Moss; the country will think so too.”

Mr. Moss was turning his face again to Pongo. Pongo opened fire first and clenched it.

“I’ve no right to be here at all, Mr. Moss,” he said, “I only came to talk to the Prime Minister about this bull-fighting business, which I trust is altogether above party.” Mr. Moss’s unchanging smile seemed just a trifle broader, but perhaps it was an illusion of the lamplight. “As I have heard you and as I have been here, I can only say that I think you know what the Opposition think.”

“Well, I’ve no business to know anything except what *we* think,” said Mr. Moss. He allowed his smile slowly to draw inwards until his mouth was normal, as the lips of an india-rubber toy face will resume their composure when the hand relaxes them. He got up to go out.

“I’m sure I’m very sorry if I interrupted,” he said as he turned to the door.

“Not at all,” said Dolly, jumping up suddenly with great courtesy, “not at all.” He even went out with Mr. Moss into the passage

to make things smooth. He was a little disappointed at Mr. Moss's lack of reciprocity during those few words in the passage. He came back and shut the door and sat down again.

"Well, Pongo," said he almost affectionately, so great was the contrast between Pongo and Moss.

"Well," said Pongo, "I suppose that means they're going to vote."

Dolly shook his head decidedly. He was an old hand.

"No," he said, "they want me to arrange." Then the shape of his face changed. He said between his teeth: "Peggy put him up to that—and old Battersea worked *her!*"

"But you *can't* arrange," said Pongo in some alarm. "You *must* have the money free!"

"Most certainly," said Dolly with bitter emphasis, remembering the Duke of Battersea and his intolerable conditions. "If he puts it in so many words he'll get a straight answer."

"Then what's to prevent their voting?" said Pongo. "Not that I mind—precious few of our fellows will go with them."

"What will prevent their voting," said Dolly serenely, "is that they haven't got the money for a Dissolution." He smiled down

at Pongo as he said it and rose. Pongo rose too.

“Battersea has!” he said.

The shouts of “Who goes home?” rang through the building and came up from Palace Yard. The House had adjourned and the recess had begun.

As the two politicians, the tall one and the short one, were going downstairs together on their way out, a thought struck Dolly and he said suddenly :

“Pongo!”

“Yes?” said Pongo.

“Do you suppose he gets that crease in his trousers with a trousers stretcher?”

“Who? Oh, Moss! No” (decidedly), “it’s done by squashing them under the mattress.”

“I never thought of that!” said Dolly thoughtfully, and they parted. He was telling the truth, this method of pressing trousers was not of his world.

As he went home he remembered Pongo’s phrase, “Battersea has!” and it troubled him.

CHAPTER X

“ Fœmina dux facti.” . . . “ Facti dux fœmina. Quid tum ? ”

“ Quid *tum* ? Tum facti, fœmina dux fuit ! ” . . .

“ Oh ! ”

VERGIL.

THE Riviera Express stops, as in duty bound, at the main stations of that charming littoral ; it reaches Mentone well on in the afternoon.

G. Quinlan Smith was finishing a late lunch in the food-car and was, according to his ancient custom, picking his teeth, as the train slowly pulled out of Villefranche, when a face not wholly unfamiliar to him attracted his attention.

It was the face of a stout, squarely built lady with the short hair and masculine appearance which so often accompanies exceptional intellectual power in women. Even a close observer would have been puzzled to say whether she was of British nationality or a citizeness of the United States, or even (though that seemed less probable) one of those pioneers of the Feminist movement in modern France who

have recently attracted the admiration and attention of the world. The Unknown had before her a whole bottle of Burgundy recently emptied—an indication of originality in itself surprising—and was on the point of pulling out a cigar-case when, as though upon second thoughts, she replaced it in a big pocket which (unconventional again) was devised upon the side of her coat.

G. Quinlan Smith was now quite sure. He gazed steadily with his piercing little eyes at the fair stranger. The fair stranger, with an almost imperceptible movement of recognition, crossed the food-car in two great strides and came and sat opposite him, putting her elbows upon the table, framing her face in her large hands, and waiting for him to speak before she would commit herself.

G. Quinlan Smith asked in English and in a low voice that anything his companion might have to say should be written down; he did not want it shouted, and at the same time he pulled out his ear-trumpet, grateful perhaps that his weakness should have full licence in that distant clime. But the lady didn't follow his instructions: she did not speak into the ear-trumpet, nor did she write anything down. Loosening from the right side of her face her large right hand, she plunged it into yet another

pocket and brought out a small parcel. George Quinlan's eyes, from being very bright, began to glisten like jewels. The parcel seemed to have an infinite number of wrappings as the lady slowly unfolded them, and at last, at long last, appeared a lovely little Rat-tailed English Silver Teaspoon! Instinctively the old man put out his hand towards it; the lady kept it just out of reach.

"I can't see it from here," complained George Quinlan.

The only reply of that determined woman was to wrap it up again and put it back in her pocket, and to write down upon a slip of paper a sum of money. She wrote it in a steady hand but with some care as though wondering whether she ought not to add yet another naught at the end of the figures; she toyed like an artist, with the pencil between her large fingers, changed a three into a five, and then pushed it over to the great collector.

G. Quinlan shook his head. The train pulled up; they were at Mentone.

The lady, who apparently knew her business, and who seemed to stand with G. Quinlan Smith on terms of commercial rather than social familiarity, got up vigorously enough from her seat, took a little handbag which was apparently her only luggage and went boldly towards the

door, as the train with a shrieking of brakes halted at the platform.

It was amazing to see how smartly the aged millionaire popped after her! The attendants struggled for his light luggage, and dashed after him; they found him elbowing through the crowd past the ticket collector; he was too hurried to count his tip, and they were amply satisfied. He had but one object, not to lose sight of the sturdy female who was forging through the foremost ranks of the passengers and was already in the open waiting-room beyond.

He hurried after. As though she gave him not a thought, not even troubling to look back at him, the good woman stepped at once into an open carriage that plied for hire outside the station: G. Quinlan, actually trotting in his anxiety, managed to scramble in without breaking his bones, just as the coachman was driving off.

The lady expressed no surprise at finding her companion again by her side. She settled herself down comfortably, she once more pulled out that tantalising parcel, unfolded it and holding the spoon almost covered in that huge fist of hers, slowly drew back her thumb from the end of the handle and disclosed the inscription, which established the use to which

Disraeli had put that article of plate on the never-to-be-forgotten occasion when he had taken tea at Les Charmettes.

The lady shouting instructions to the coachman in a rich baritone, they had got out of the watering-place, far on the mountain road and they were free to talk. G. Quinlan Smith had mounted his ear-trumpet and was in the process of eager bargaining, shaking his head repeatedly, and provoking upon his companion's features a more and more determined squareness of the mouth; when both parties looked up on finding the carriage stopping. The coachman had pulled up at the *octroi* of a little town.

The hot southern sun, though the afternoon was well worn, was beating strongly upon the white road and the white walls of the place. No official responsible for the *octroi* seemed to be present, a group of men lolled on a bench in the shadow of the house; the horse stood, glad of the moment's rest, his head sunk and his whole attitude expressing an angular repose. The coachman got off his box lazily enough, saying he would fetch the man—he dared not go past the bureau without examination for he had a local reputation to lose. Madame, leaning back in her seat, watched without interest the group in the shadow, when—when—her eye lit upon one member of it. In that

shadow of the *octroi*, among the rest, lolled one or two companion officials, and with them a policeman of gorgeous plumage who recalled to the disgusted eyes of G. Quinlan Smith the affected uniforms of the Latin republics that disgrace his native continent. He was a superb big man with a monstrous great sword at his side, booted and spurred, and moustached like a hero. Nothing in the little scene interested him, but the lady was eyeing him curiously.

Then, with extraordinary suddenness, there happened one of those incidents which come with such violent shock upon those who are imperfectly acquainted with their causes. Madame rose suddenly in her place, leaned over the driver's empty box, seized the reins and whip, and gave the animal a cut that started it galloping full speed down the street of the little place !

With repeated blows she drove the horse at the utmost of its speed, careless of children, stray poultry, and uneven paving. She drove furiously and madly, shouted at the beast a hundred rich oaths, urging it to superequine efforts. She looked back hurriedly every now and then over her shoulder during that mad race, to see excited groups and clouds of dust dwindling behind her. She still flogged and roared when she was well away from the houses

and up high on the rising mountain-side ; she kept the pace at its most furious stretch mile after mile, until two bad stumbles and a sudden obstinate halt told her that she had reached the limit of the poor brute's capacity. He stood shivering and in a desperate sweat for all his leanness ; he might fall at any moment. There was nothing to do but to change her plan.

George Quinlan Smith during all that furious and insane ten minutes had felt like a man in a railway accident ; he had clutched the side of the carriage nervously as it swayed like a ship in a storm ; he had given little grunts and squeaks of terror at the turning of the corners, and at one point where a vision of death yawned in the gulf of the road-edge, he suddenly remembered one of those prayers which in early youth the Hicksite Quakers (his mother's persuasion) had taught him in the little Sunday School at Yuntville, Bear Co., Pa., his childhood's home. The breakdown of their steed was a relief to the millionaire : to his companion it was the very reverse. She produced for the occasion a new series of local oaths muttered and short, leapt from the vehicle and stood for a moment with her forefinger to her forehead and her feet planted sturdily apart in a Napoleonic attitude of deep but rapid survey, while

the old man, descending more slowly upon his side, stood helpless and awaited her decision.

To that decision she came in a very few moments. She turned to ask his aid, but he could not hear. He discovered in that unhappy moment that his ear-trumpet had fallen at the beginning of the stampede; and it did not comfort him when his companion shouted to him in the most disrespectful manner that that would be a clue.

They had halted at a point in the road where a plantation of rock pines fell steeply into the valley below; a cart-track here led off the road and down the sharp stony hill to the left through the trees. The lady's plan was soon fixed; she unhitched the traces with a rapidity surprising in one of her sex, led out the trembling animal, which stood dejected by the roadside, seized the shafts, backed the vehicle on to the ill-defined side road, and with a vigorous shove sent it crashing down below. It ran bumping down the precipitous incline, toppled over an edge and disappeared.

There was still the horse to be considered, and madame looked at it in a solemn way as a great general might look upon the dying form of an ally in some phase of a battle not yet decided. She would willingly have cut its throat, but she had no knife, and besides, the operation might have

been a long and doubtful one. She thought of something better than that ; she led it into the thick of the wood, positively lifting it down the steepest bits, and beckoned G. Quinlan to scramble after her.

The poor old man had no choice. Scramble after her he did, past the point where the carriage had crashed down the steep bank, past where it lay below half hidden in the high brushwood, until, two or three hundred feet below the road, the three of them, the Horse, the Lady, and the Millionaire, reached the brook that still trickled at this early season in the rocky bed of the ravine.

A path of sorts followed the water. G. Quinlan was walking uneasily. The lady (who must surely at some time or other have served in a mounted force !) caught a loop in the near trace, buckled it over the saddle by way of stirrup, put the old gentleman's left foot into it, and swung the featherweight of him up on the animal's back.

So arranged did they double upon their track ; the man riding, the horse bearing, the lady walking. There was much of the expert in this marvellous woman, and G. Quinlan Smith, for all his increasing disgust, began to feel a sort of confidence in her generalship. He did not attempt to interfere.

They had proceeded perhaps a mile in this

fashion, when they had the comfort of hearing upon the road above them the clatter of horses, and they could see upon the sky-line the mounted police dashing along in chase of that devil's carriage.

The worthy lady laughed ! She foresaw those dreadful servants of authority still galloping up that road long past the place where the carriage had been drawn off and hidden—they would certainly miss the scent. After all they were not Red Indians ; it was rather she who was the Apache ; nor were there any signs save the cessation of the faint wheel-tracks on the hard road to show where the drive had ended. She foresaw them hammering away up the Sospel Road—she knew every inch of it. She knew that *they* knew what houses and what persons were most familiar with the surreptitious collectors of treasure in that region ; she could see them in her mind's eye enquiring, cross-examining, ferreting through houses all the way to Sospel, and she was very pleased as she continued her slow progress with her companion down the ravine.

It was still full daylight when she paused under the houses of the little town of the *octroi* where the adventure had begun ; those houses stood up above her on the height, one or two straggling down the side of the ravine, but none reaching the stream itself. She risked the passage past

those windows—for who could dream that the occupants of that carriage were escaping in such a way? Before dark she was back again in the neighbourhood of Mentone, of the railway and of safety. And here was another problem solved, for the horse would know his way to the stable. There was evidently a sentimental side to the lady, for when she had helped old Smith down to his feet again, after she had reached the outskirts of the town, she pulled a piece of bread from her pocket, offered it to the weary steed (who greedily accepted it), gave him a gentle pat, and saw him meander off down some well-known path towards his home.

It was now evening, and their progress was the safer; besides which, the police would never have had the sense to telephone to Mentone; their thoughts were on the Sospel Road. The two fugitives were not looked for in that town and no description of them would yet be abroad. By noon of the next day the carriage might be discovered, and it would be a different business.

Meanwhile they could rest.

She beckoned the millionaire to follow her; he humbly did so, wondering what would be the end of this unpleasing series of adventures, terribly weary, and for almost the first time in his life beginning to wonder whether his health would stand the racket.

They came to the slatternly back door of a slatternly small house on the outskirts of the town. The lady rapped with her knuckles, and the pair of them were admitted.

G. Quinlan Smith found himself in a long low room, at one end of which a fowl was roasting on a great spit over an open wood fire ; half a dozen very disreputable men, handsome, brown, curly-haired, and the reverse of timid, were gambling with an exceedingly greasy pack of small cards at a rickety deal table. A grimy oil-lamp swung from the low ceiling ; and as his companion nodded to Smith and motioned him to sit down upon the rough bench, she gasped aloud in *patois*, “*Todo là por ung cuiller !*” which is, being interpreted, “*All that for a spoon !*” She smiled a rich smile, asked the oldest man for wine, bread and sausage ; they were brought, and she began to make a hearty meal.

CHAPTER XI

“But no object, however beautiful, however rare, will profit us in its pursuit unless it lead us at last to Praise and Joy.”—RUSKIN.

“Begin no enterprise until you have well considered the end of it.”—HIPPOCRATES.

GEORGE QUINLAN SMITH was too deaf, too tired, and too much alarmed to notice very clearly what was going on around him. His companion put some of the garlic sausage and a hunk of bread before him, and poured out the rough wine, but none of these were in his habits at all. It was not safe for a man of eighty-three to play tricks with himself in the way of food. Sweetbreads, for instance, were strictly forbidden to George Quinlan by his eighteen medical advisers, and asparagus, he was assured, contained a subtle poison which would be the end of him. Now George Quinlan Smith had no desire to die. He sniffed wearily at the sausage, discovered it to be something very alien to his habits in the way of food, and as a dog an onion or a cat an olive he pushed it away. The wine he shuddered at. He nibbled at the bread.

Meanwhile madame, eating heartily, and drinking more heartily still, became another woman.

The same vigour which had inspired her strategic genius now expanded in rough songs reminiscent of the barrack-room and of the docks. More than one of these was caught up by her companions in chorus, and it was not until long past midnight that she found herself fully relaxed from the efforts of the day. To accomplish this result it took about four of the large stoups of wine, half a long loaf of bread, and perhaps a pound and a half of sausage, but relaxed at last she was, and recreated in her whole being. With two great stretches of arms and limbs, utterly lacking in refinement, a kind but coarse smile at the old gentleman, an expressed anxiety on the score of his health (for if G. Quinlan feared his own death, *she* feared it much more—and for very practical reasons), a drowsy advice to him to do as she herself was doing, the wonderful woman flopped down at length upon the rough bench, two of her new-found comrades threw sacks over her robust form, and before long she was snoring in a manner that would have been intolerable to G. Quinlan Smith had he been able to hear a note of the performance.

He, poor old man, still sat there and shivered. He tried again to get some comfort from the

bread and failed. He sipped the wine and was again repelled; then, finding sleep half come upon him, he sat there in his place, with his thin arms resting on the board and his chin occasionally nodding upon his chest. The others paid not the slightest attention to him. One by one they dropped off to their benches, until two alone were left, pursuing an eternal game of cards.

What followed in the mind of the millionaire was a sort of nightmare. There were moments of drowsiness when he forgot that he was alive; from these he would wake in a start to see the dim, dirty lamp above him, to smell the horrid smells of the place and the relics of greasy cooking. Then he would nod off again, and dream that he was sitting in a day coach of the Southern Pacific, which for some reason had stopped too long at some dirty little depot in the hills. And then again he would become just conscious enough to think he was in the waiting-room of such a place, when a foreign oath from the lips of one of the two gamblers would recall him to his situation, and he shivered.

Upon all this there must have followed four or five hours of real sleep, for he could remember no more until the cold woke him.

The poor old chap lifted his head from his arms and looked round haggardly at the room.

The two gamblers had gone. The long, low,

dirty place was lit by a sort of skylight, through which filtered the dawn. The long bearded Elder, who was apparently the head of that den, slept bolt upright in the corner, and G. Quinlan Smith, whose acquaintance with art had since the acquisition of his millions grown extensive though uncritical, saw in his features that permanent and striking type which is the model of the great Italian artists. He had a fevered memory of a St. Peter looking like that, a St. Peter asleep in Gethsemane, propped up against a rock, a St. Peter painted in Tuscany, and owned, if he remembered rightly, by Kuhnen, the man who had tried to freeze them all out in '86. He remembered that Kuhnen was dead. . . .

The others lay scattered about, some on the floor, some on the benches. One, like himself, had slept with his head upon his arms on the table and was still so asleep. That woman of genius who had conducted his affairs still snored in the most complex manner upon her bench, immobile beneath the heap of sacks. At last he knew the sun had risen, for a bright line of light lay level with the edge of the skylight upon the opposing wall.

The Great Feminist stirred in her sleep. She threw off the sacks from her skirts, swivelled round in her seat, put her feet upon the floor, dug her huge fists into her eyes, stretched again as she

had stretched before sinking into her slumber, and stood up in her full bulk, saying "Allongs!" in a cheerful nasal and most profoundly, deeply resonant tone.

Her drowsy but rapidly wakening eye caught G. Quinlan Smith. She shook her head despondently, as one who might say there was nothing more to be done, and tapped upon the shoulder the Elder who presided over that den. He woke with a start and asked her what she wanted. She asked for soap and a razor. There was a little discussion and grumbling, but the lady made her case good. Shaving was more important to her than to any of the comrades. Her dress alone necessitated it. The greybeard St. Peter pulled out from a cupboard a dirty dish, a very dirty scrub of brush, an aged razor, bright only at the edge, on the blade a mass of rust. The lady poured into the dish a little tepid water from a saucepan beside the dying embers of the fire, and began to lather.

George Quinlan Smith, stupid after such a night, watched unintelligently though he understood how necessary it was that a lady should not go out unshaven in a town where the police abound, and where the wealthy, being cosmopolitan, are eminently suspicious. He further watched without interest the manœuvres of his companion as she began to remove the stubble

from her right cheek and upper lip, not without verbal criticism of the intense pain the operation caused her.

Then suddenly a very loud and authoritative bang, instinet with that sense of authority which is so deplorably developed in your Latin, was heard upon the door by which they had both entered the evening before.

The Elder, the St. Peter, the chief of the gang, leapt at that door with the agility of a boy. He stooped for a moment holding his breath, and then asked gently and with admirable simulation of a voice just awakened from sleep, whether it were not Mother Misery, and if so whether she expected him to get up at such an hour. To this the force outside replied by a charge which almost burst the rickety thing in. The chief within met it by a very loud and voluble speech. He dragged a bench in front of the door, pulled up the table immediately to reinforce it, and asked again who was without.

The lady had stopped shaving. Here was a case where the most rapid decision was of no avail. The chimney was too narrow; to dive under the table would be puerile. She took the better course, seized her grey-bearded commander (if he was her commander) by the shoulders and pulled him aside, replaced the table and pushed back the bench, and opening

the bolts of the door just as the second charge was being delivered against it, let two of six gendarmes, accoutred in that fine uniform which G. Quinlan had remarked at the beginning of his drive, fall sprawling into the room.

The offence to their dignity gravely annoyed them. They stood for a moment cursing and brushing the dust from their clothes, while all the occupants of the shed, now awakened, stood sullenly huddled together at the farther end near the fireplace, scowling.

The lady alone seemed to have experience. She led G. Quinlan forward by one hand, presented him to the Brigadier, and asked in her hearty baritone whether she also were required, explaining that any evidence which she could give would be readily offered in the interests of justice.

This manly and decided action upon her part, which is known in the slang of her sunlit and happy country as "burning the butt-end," in less favoured climes as "turning up a pal," but to the law of Great Britain as offering evidence for the Crown, produced no effect upon the Brigadier, who, bagging his two prisoners with dexterity and ordering handcuffs to be slipped on each of them bundled them into the guardianship of a particularly stupid blond companion, and proceeded to warn the remaining occupants of the shed that if

they had any weapons they should deposit them upon the table before him at the risk of the consequences that followed upon infraction of the Articles in the Code concerning the carrying of firearms.

To this citation one of the youngest of the citizens present replied by shooting from his coat pocket, a position from which it is almost impossible to take an accurate aim, and breaking with the missile so discharged a pane of glass in the skylight. There followed, of course, a sharp rush, in which the much stronger, much cleaner, much better drilled and much braver police did for the little knot of recalcitrants, pummelled, bound, twisted, handcuffed, lifted, threw, stunned them, and in other ways impressed their superiority. They were filed out, counted, secured with the short pieces of regulation rope which had been thoughtfully provided by the Brigadier as he left barracks (seeing that there were but two pairs of handcuffs available, and that he knew not what resistance might be offered), and, so much done, they were all marched off through the pleasant scent of the morning. It was spring upon those stony hills, and one could almost smell the flowers upon the slopes behind the town.

It has often been remarked that men who succeed to high positions at the Bar or in the

political world, or in manufacture, or finance, or as burglars, cut-throats, poisoners, or even common parasites, are in general men of a superior physique. They live to an old age, and stories are told of their activity and capacity in their more advanced years before they go to meet that God whom it has been their business either to deny or to abuse.

So it was with G. Quinlan Smith. He endured it—though he only just endured it. He ascribed to his evident social rank and to the excellence of his now crumpled and dirty but still expensive clothing, the fact that he was treated in a peculiar manner, that he was escorted by two of the uniformed gentlemen, one on either side, and that the rest were kept from conversing with him. In this estimate G. Quinlan was wrong, but who would deny to the aged these little sops to their self-esteem? They have so few years in which to continue the illusions of that comfortable dream!

The procession took the straight way for an office of admirable if rather exaggerated architecture flanked with bold statues and dignified with remarkable carving. G. Quinlan Smith, upon seeing so much luxury, hoped against hope that he was approaching the house of some rich man where his position would at once be recognised. The man may have been rich, but position weighed not with him, for he was a magis-

trate, nor was this his house. He had come down not in the best of tempers at such an early hour, to fill in such papers as the police required.

This magistrate was waiting in the police bureau of the great public building. He was absurdly tall, yellow-faced, a Ligurian noble by birth, and with an accent you could cut with a knife. His father kept racehorses, and he had himself a Government salary of £80 a year. He glared at the prisoners. He had already filled in every detail in the papers but the names, and these he completed as rapidly as they were given.

When it came to the turn of that strong woman who had met defeat at last she gave the name unblushingly : Jean Jacques Bertot—and her baritone was a pleasure to hear, as was her confidence a pleasure to see in such a shivering crowd. The Brigadier murmured, “ Offers evidence as to the principal prisoner ” ; and the tall, yellow-faced, salaried, be-nobled-racehorses-fathered Ligurian made a little flourish at the end of the entry which signified that “ the prisoner disguised as a woman offers evidence against the chief prisoner.” He looked as he did so a trifle less saturnine. The half-shaven lady noted that expression with pleasure.

“ Is there anything I can say now ? ” she volunteered.

“ Certainly not ! ” said the tall and gloomy

lawyer. "I will telephone!" Then he asked off-handedly, "what Assize Court is to be filled in?"

The Brigadier answered "Tarascon." And as he said it he took G. Quinlan Smith by the wrist and gave him a jerk forward which was wholly devoid of that deference which the old man had again begun to expect.

"Nom, prénoms, domicile, occupation, et cetera?" said the Ligurian, sighing comfortably at the end of his task, and looking forward to the bed into which he was about to creep after this rude early morning's summons.

G. Quinlan Smith looked at him with those bright eyes of his and said nothing.

The Ligurian changed in a snap. He became voluble. He explained with extreme rapidity that he was not used to that kind of thing, that it would be the worse for any prisoner who "played the strong head," that he had tamed many—and so forth.

The aged American, noticing his excitement, lifted a forefinger and began to wag it. But the gesture had not the effect of soothing his judge, who, with an intensity of emotion with which the New England States are quite unfamiliar, began to show his teeth and to grind them, to bang upon the table, to advance his face close to that of his opponent, and in general to do all those

undignified things which no magistrate should permit himself.

The half-shaven lady told the Brigadier to tell the magistrate that the gentleman was deaf.

The Ligurian simmered down again, and as he sat down to the papers wrote "simulates deafness. Refuses name." He then filled in against the poor, dear old millionaire the name given him by the police and the ceremony was over.

They all filed out again, police and prisoners, to the railway station, took that early morning omnibus train along the Mediterranean coast which is charged with the despair of summer mornings, rumbled through station after station all day long, and just as it was getting dark came after two changes to Tarascon.

They were marched immediately to the jail. Another set of weary formalities before another magistrate, a very old man who took snuff, ended the day.

G. Quinlan Smith could not at the best of times have heard the muttered words, still less have understood them ; but had he been permitted to see them in writing and in English he would have learned the very important fact that he was a Warned One, to be regarded as Innocent until he was proved Guilty ; to be treated in every way as a Free Citizen save by such Measure of Force

as might be necessary to prevent his escape whether from terror or from consciousness of guilt, or any other cause. The law safeguarded George Quinlan Smith in every way, but, alas ! he did not know it.

He found himself in a cell of which this is the exact description : it was 16 feet by 9 in superficial dimensions, no less than 14 feet in height, having, just above that point which could be reached by a man standing upon the only stool of the place, a grated window made to open or to shut upon the outside, barred within, and just so deep as to be not reachable by a hand from the inward side through the bars. Here were a bed with a straw mattress, two rugs and a sort of oil-cloth pillow, an earthenware pitcher and a large round loaf of bread. In the door was a little hole through which the prisoner could be watched. It was just after nine when that door was shut upon him and George Quinlan Smith was left to sleep.

He did not ponder. He was very old and very tired. If he had been younger he would have cried. As it was his poor eyes drooped ; he rolled miserably on to the bed and drew a blanket over him, leaving the other between himself and the ticking. It was mortal cold he thought ! After such terrible fatigues sleep was upon him, when he felt a lump in his pocket which made

him uncomfortable. Drowsily he put his hand into that pocket and drew out, of all things in the world, the tissue paper and the string, and within the midst that SPOON which had been the true begetter of all these vile adventures.

CHAPTER XII

“Hail! wedded love!”
MILTON.

ON the morning after Mr. Moss had riveted Dolly's attention by the really ridge-like creases of his trousers, on the morning to which George Quinlan Smith had awakened in the thieves' den of Provence broken with fatigue, to see the sunlight begin its streak through the skylight upon the farther wall: in the later hours, while G. Quinlan was being rolled, despairing, along the coast to Tarascon—on that morning and in those later hours Dolly awoke. The first thing he did when he got down was to ask Eddie to put him on to Mary Smith's house; but she could tell him nothing. Her uncle had not returned.

The second thing Dolly did was to ask Eddie to put him on to Pongo's house, and by the best of good luck he found that Pongo had not yet left London, and would very obediently come as he was bid, or, better still, meet Dolly when and where he chose.

They met at the Blue Posts to lunch together.

It was the one club where they could talk long and intimately without anxiety, for the Blue Posts was made for luncheons and for nothing else, and there were even Bishops in it, and two publishers, and a foreign Duke. It was not a club where any one would dream of politics.

Pongo had heard nothing more than Dolly had told him, and it was possible that with his simple nature he hardly understood the full importance of Mr. Smith's singular disappearance.

"But after all it's easy enough to find out," he said.

Dolly agreed that it was. Before the cheese was on the table he had already pursued five avenues by way of messages on the telephone, by way of the club servants and by way of still more stupid messengers in taxis; every single one of the scents failed. Mr. Smith had not come to the office; Mr. Smith's man had no idea where Mr. Smith was; Mr. Smith had booked no carriage through his usual agency in any train; and so forth. Dolly and Pongo lingered on at the Blue Posts till four; the last of the messengers had returned as blank as the first.

Dolly pondered. Old Smith had gone out; he had gone without any particular preparation; he had gone in a taxi; he had gone with a little bag; he had gone perhaps to make a purchase, or to pay a visit close to London—probably in-

tending to be back that night—and something had kept him. . . . But if something had kept him he would have communicated with his niece. . . . He was an old man, and he had fallen upon some sort of accident. It *must* be possible enough to find out, and the best way of all was for Dolly to go himself at once to the City office, and tell them that all the means he had at his disposal would be at their service ; for Smith, Fischer and Co. must be growing as anxious as Dolly himself, though, doubtless, for a different reason.

He begged Pongo before he left the Blue Posts not to leave London that day, and the faithful Pongo promised he would not.

“ You see,” he said, “ it *may* be necessary, it just *may* be necessary to extend the recess.”

“ I see,” said Pongo, nodding his square head, and pressing together the lips of his firm mouth.

“ I *trust* not,” said Dolly, with almost pathetic anxiety in his eyes, “ I *trust* not, but if the old man can't be found . . . ! ”

“ Yes, I see,” said Pongo. “ It was pretty well understood with him, wasn't it—I mean about the loan ? ”

“ Oh, perfectly,” said Dolly airily, “ perfectly. *That's* all right. But you see he must be *there*. He must be on the spot. No one at the office will know anything about it as yet.” And the

sickening thought that his saviour might at that moment have passed beyond the power of saving him gave him a very nasty jerk even as he used that airy tone.

“Are you going to his office now?” asked Pongo.

“Yes,” said Dolly decidedly, “I shall go there straight.” And this he said because he intended to do nothing of the kind: being a politician and vaguely dependent upon lying as a general habit even before he had formed any definite plan. He said good-bye to Pongo almost warmly for so old and so close an acquaintance, and urged him again most anxiously not to leave London; he even made an appointment to meet late in the afternoon; which done he lounged away as though at his ease, and once out of sight bolted for Mary Smith’s.

He had it out with her. She could tell him nothing. She was not anxious; she trusted her uncle’s good sense. He had often been away for a night, though never for more, from her house at least, without giving any notice. After all he was deaf and used to having his own way into the bargain. She really couldn’t say why he had gone, she didn’t know very much of his habits, she could suggest a few houses, but then Dolly knew them as well as she did.

“Is his secretary in?” asked Dolly doggedly.

“ Yes,” said Mary Smith, smiling grimly, “ he’s always in.”

“ Does he have his meals with you ? ” asked Dolly.

“ No ! ” said Mary firmly.

“ Well, but hang it all ! ” said Dolly.

“ No,” said Mary again, ticking off on her fingers ; “ there are the servants, the upper servants, and the housekeeper ; then there’s the chauffeur, and then, O Lord, there’s him, the secretary ! It needs a big house for all these separate meals, my dear,” she said, looking affectionately at Dolly for sympathy.

But Dolly was too perturbed to follow her domestic troubles.

“ Can I see the secretary ? ” he asked anxiously.

“ Oh yes, you can see him,” answered Mary.

“ Won’t you ring for him ? ”

“ Ring for him ! ” said Mary. “ You might as well ring for the Rubber King ! You must approach him, Dolly, you must entreat an audience. Go up and knock at the door ; pretend you thought it was the library.”

Then did the Prime Minister of England go upstairs with his charming and elderly cousin by his side, arm-in-arm with her until upon a high landing whose window overlooked the vast Metropolis she pointed archly down a corridor to a little blue door and whispered :

“That’s it! Never take your eyes off him, don’t let him get between you and the door, and speak to him in soothing tones!” She saw Dolly knocking at the end of that corridor; she heard his well modulated, high-pitched drawl, “Oh, I thought it was the library? I *beg* your pardon!” And she left him at it.

He reappeared in five minutes a trifle red and not at all pleased.

“He is not a polite young man,” said the Prime Minister of England.

“No!” said Mary. “Does he know where uncle’s gone?”

“I don’t thi-n-k so,” said Dolly musing. “I *honestly* don’t think so. But if he did he wouldn’t tell,” he added more briskly.

“Is he worried about it?” said Mary.

“Oh, not a *bit*,” said Dolly, “le dernier de ses soucis!”

“No,” said Mary thoughtfully, “he wouldn’t be.”

“Is he in your uncle’s will?” said Dolly.

“Oh no,” said Mary. “Wills cut no ice. Uncle’s sunk a fund against his death. That little horror gets twenty thousand!” she sighed. “Uncle bought it for sixteen, years ago. And he’s got it in his claws. But he can’t anticipate.”

Dolly was moody. He allowed the vision of the secretary to fade from his mind. It

was nearly three, and he bethought him of the office.

“I’ll go to Smith, Fischer and Co.,” he said.

“I’ll go now, myself.”

“Is that wise?” Mary asked dubiously.

“Let me telephone, and let me tell them that you will do anything you can. I’ll make it a sort of favour: it won’t look so much like a favour if they see you bothering to go there; besides which the Peabody Yid will be watching everybody to-day.”

She telephoned to Smith, Fischer and Co. at once. The office had heard nothing of Mr. Smith, but when they knew who it was that was telephoning and heard of her anxiety, they sent a Man of Confidence round in double quick time, and his motor buzzed up to the door ten minutes after she put the receiver back on its hook.

How well did not Mary Smith act her part! How great is the power of affection, how weak the tie of acquaintance however severe or prolonged! She determined to throw old Battersea over: and throw over that Peabody Yid she very heartily did—never more heartily than in the conversation which she held with the Man of Confidence. Her voice was feminine and pleading. She was distracted about her uncle. She could very easily get tears into her handsome

elderly eyes upon any matter ; she put one well-moulded and plump hand upon the Man of Confidence's shoulder in the extremity of her woe, and caused him to confide in her as never Man of Confidence did before. She heard a hundred of her uncle's little habits of which she had never dreamed—but where he could conceivably be now she did not learn.

Then suddenly, as though the most brilliant and unexpected of thoughts had struck her, she said radiantly :

“ Oh, by the way, the Prime Minister has been here. Perhaps he's still here ; he was looking at a book I had to show him. I am sure he'd do *anything*.”

The Man of Confidence murmured that it was very good of him. The bell was answered. Yes, Dolly was in. “ It was a happy coincidence,” said Mary, “ he was *so* thoughtful, so kind, so really good. He would do *anything* ! ”

The Man of Confidence was a trifle awed at Dolly's coming, but the Prime Minister was *so* tactful, *so* charming in every way. He would see to it that during that afternoon *everything* should be done that could help the firm. He *hoped*, of course, that nothing had happened to so valuable a life, but of course so many hours' absence . . .

The Man of Confidence smiled an archaic

Yankee smile contracted in that best of city offices, and confidentially confided that Mr. Smith was sometimes away for months.

Dolly's mobile face went rapidly through three contortions, landed on its feet, and the lips expressed in tones somewhat tremulous but still controlled the hope that *anything* he could do, &c. &c.

The Man of Confidence was shown out with all that charming courtesy which is the appanage of the very rich, and which somehow got him out of their way without his knowing how, but when he was gone Dolly did not fail him. He sent to the right people in the right way; the Government of a Free People was at work as desperately as though it were dealing with Ireland, and all that afternoon Smith, Fischer and Co. were receiving their reports. The telephone exchanges were under tribute, letters to certain addresses were duly steamed and opened, telegrams were copied; to see the work doing at some post offices one would have thought oneself, I say, in Ireland. In one way or another George Quinlan Smith cost the British taxpayer on that afternoon anything between two and three thousand pounds. Some of it appeared upon the Vote for the Colonies, some upon that for Deep Sea Fishing Protection—where the rest was faked I have had no opportunity to discover. Nothing came of it. Out of

three or four hundred steamed letters only a little scandal; of telegrams the copies showed only three—each unintelligible—as a clue. One was code and indecipherable. One was signed “Parseval,” and related to some relative journeying to Villefranche, and to a spoon. The third was begging for money from a relative, and even that was too terse. It was a pity telegraphese was so jerky.

Dolly did not like to appear too anxious, but when the time had come for his rendezvous with Pongo, since nothing had come out with regard to the runaway, and since Pongo also in his own innocent manner had drawn blank, he began to be seriously alarmed. He did not care to disturb his wife so early in the day; it was more usual for him to ring her up just before she went to dress for dinner, and it was as yet but half-past six o'clock. Peggy had never had any use for fal-lals; an hour was good enough for her to dress in. She wouldn't be in yet; but his anxiety would not let him bide. He rang up Battersea House; by good luck she was in already! He told her that Mary Smith didn't happen to know whether her uncle was coming in to dinner or not. Could Peggy tell him?

No, Peggy didn't know. But she'd ask old Battersea. She came back to the telephone in a moment. Old Battersea didn't know; she rang

off, and the husband and wife had no further reason to communicate until the following day. But the following day of course she would hear from him, for they never allowed twenty-four hours to pass if they were both in London without speaking to each other over the wire. They were not really happy for very long out of each other's society, in spite of what the gossips said, and wherever Dolly might be dining, supping or lunching, it was quite even chances that Peggy would be seen there too.

* * *

There is something a little uncanny about the sudden silence which follows a brief talk over the telephone and the exchange of words with a familiar voice.

Dolly felt it that evening. It was not yet dark but the big old eighteenth-century room was mournful with high, lifting lines. He almost felt lonely. And then he began to have an uncomfortable feeling, wondering whether he had acted wisely or no, or, to speak more accurately, wondering whether his tone had not given his anxiety away to one who knew him as intimately as did his wife. The thought troubled him. He would have a chop grilled and sent up to his room. He would spend the evening working ; it would distract him.

* * *

In Battersea House there happened to be quite a big dinner that night, and though Peggy had dined with her dear old friends twice in the last fortnight, they begged her as a favour to give them that evening, and she had consented. She did not forget her husband's query. She asked the Duke in the middle of the plovers' eggs whether he had heard anything of old Mr. Smith.

The Duke, with his mouth full of three of those dainties, despatched the greater part of that food down his gullet in spite of his advanced years, choked a moment as the result, said something in German to a servant behind him, and when he had recovered his breath told her that the old Yankee had left London. The Duke detested Yankees ; they had not the English way of doing business ; there was something too smart about them altogether.

“ Your husband he thinks that, eh Peg-gy ? ”

Peggy got annoyed. He proceeded to expound his theories on the superiority of English business men to the Yankees.

Peggy cut him short by asking how he knew that old Smith had gone, and the Duke of Battersea permitted himself that which in poorer men is called a leer. One could even see a portion of his tongue protruding from between the left corners of his considerable lips, but whether this gesture were performed to recover a fragment of plover's

egg or to express an emotion of the financial soul, it was impossible to say.

“It’s all ofer dher City, all ofer dher City,” murmured the old man confidentially to her, using a phrase which she had heard from all her relatives a little too often in her life.

“Oh, is it ?” she snapped, “well you might have told me earlier. Dolly wanted to know.”

The Duke of Battersea was showing keen enjoyment. He had been finding out things that day. He had communicated with one or two of his advertising agents ; he had even been so courteous as to call personally upon at least one great newspaper. He had attended to a few stocks and he had moved a Press agency in Paris.

There are those who think that the work of great financiers is done for them by others ; they are mistaken. But the Duke of Battersea was an exceptionally industrious old man.

* * *

Dolly, in his great room, had finished his grilled chop, his glass of wine, his piece of toast, and his hygienic tabloid. He was at work again, trying to keep his mind off the matter of George Quinlan Smith, which must necessarily lie until the next day.

Eddie had gone. Dolly tried to persuade himself that he liked the loneliness ; but all that

evening as he worked the words of the Man of Confidence recurred to him: "Sometimes old Smith is away for months." He cursed in his heart the off-handedness of great wealth.

Then he would look at the matter more quietly for twenty minutes. Of course it had only been a hurried conversation; Mr. Smith could not possibly understand the urgency—then he would lose his temper again. Mr. Smith knew what it was leading up to, and how important it was. . . . Damn it all! Perhaps old Smith thought a week didn't matter. . . . The Prime Minister got himself into a regular stew.

He tried to turn his mind off again by arranging the points of an address on the Theory of Parallelism, a subject on which he knew nothing, and which, none the less, he was compelled to speak of in his capacity of Chancellor of the Woman's University at Bletchley. Had he studied elementary mathematics in his youth the subject (which is, after all, an engrossing one) might have distracted him. But he lacked all primitive enthusiasm for the calculus; he could vaguely remember quadratics, and they had bored him. In his head he mixed them up with logarithms. And all the while he worried about George Quinlan Smith, until it became an obsession. Long before three o'clock he went to bed, fearing for his repose.

What says the Song of Roland in its noble strain ? It says and says continually :

“ The nights do pass, and rise again the days.”

The next morning had come upon that troubled mind. Dolly, as was his custom, still lay in bed, and, as also was his custom, slept. His sleep was disturbed. He had even suffered from a dream. It seemed to him in his dream that he had taken a taxi and that as he got into it the man turned round and said with an expression of singular intensity and force : “ You aren't the bloody fine fellow you think yourself ! ” And then without a moment's further hesitation had driven him full speed up into the air !

It was but a foolish dream, but Dolly was no longer young, and there had been dizzy depths below him during that rocketing journey ; and from the moment when that dream had disturbed him and he had half wakened (it was then but ten o'clock) he had dozed uneasily. It was now noon, and he could sleep no more. His man was surprised to hear the bell at such an hour, but there was no delay. He brought his master up his private post and the glass of hot water with which Dolly invariably began the high daily mission of the first of English gentlemen ; then he went out again, leaving that regular copy of the *Capon* by his master's bed.

Dolly did not read the papers. It was a habit

he had formed twenty years before when he had found them too offensive for words and when even those which were supposed to be supporting him introduced subtle threats and elements of blackmail into their leaders. That morning, as upon every other morning, he opened the *Capon*. After all, he held its proprietors pretty tightly. He gave just a glance at the general nature of the news by the headlines before he should see it in more detail on the tape and hear from his secretary the things that most concerned him, European and domestic ; for it was what had not been allowed to reach the Press, rather than what had got into it by accident, which he chiefly desired to hear from Eddie with each new morning.

He felt dazed and uncomfortable as he opened the *Capon*. He had slept ill and it weighed upon him . . . the headlines were dull ; he did vaguely wonder whether he should see the name of Smith among the movements of the rich, but there was nothing there. Then a phrase caught his eye quite by accident. It was under a standing column called " Political Notes," which he vaguely remembered Eddie had told him was written by some cousin or other of Charlie Webster's . . . the man had been pointed out to him at a dinner . . . he had been in the House once, and he knew quite a lot of people.

Dolly glanced at the phrase languidly without actually reading the words, still thinking about what should have made any of the Websters or their connections take to journalism . . . and such journalism ! . . . when that phrase again hit him. It was leaded and black : “ And we understand that the Prime Minister will make a statement upon the subject to-day.”

There was nothing in that ; if Dolly could only have got sleepy again he would have slept to his natural hour of one. But his mood was abnormal and feverish and he read up the column to see what it was all about, as a man in a nervous condition waiting anxiously for a train whose lateness may cause him great loss lets his eyes wander feverishly over a meaningless railway notice in a station.

Then, in spite of himself, his brain corresponded with his eye, and he found that he was reading at length all up the column a detailed description of how *it was all nonsense that the Indian Loan was going to be ear-marked for relief works.*

Elderly as he was, Dolly woke up suddenly as though some playful fellow had thrown a bucket of water over him. He sat bolt upright and read for all he was worth. He knew how many thousands would be reading that in the *Capon*—how many of those compelled to rise at

unearthly hours would have read it already at the tables where they ate their horrible breakfasts in the suburbs. He thought of his own disgusting middle-class constituents and he shuddered inwardly; then he thought of the people on the back benches behind him, and shuddered outwardly as well. There it was in black and white! A long notice in a paper which was always said to be his (it wasn't *exactly* his) and that paper dragging up the one thing on which he had seen to it that there should be silence, or, what was better than silence, ambiguity!

He pulled the cord of the electric bell as though he were fifty years younger and it were an old-fashioned tassel hanging to a cord. It broke. He was fain to get out of bed, so eager was he upon his next move. He bawled through the door as though his wretched man was to blame for what had happened, and shouted pettishly enough that he wanted *all* the papers.

He was understood not too literally, and in less than half an hour, during which interval he made it very unpleasant for more than one of his domestics, a sheaf of journals was brought. There was the *Moon*, which had published an early edition, the *Repartee*, the *Eagle*, and half a dozen others, and on the top of the batch the *News* (of Leicester) which was the organ of the Midlands since Billington had bought it, and

which still counted with just that group of constituencies which had latterly shown a little too much independence. The *News* had jogged (or its proprietor had jogged) the Midland representatives in Parliament. Therefore did Dolly turn to the *News*, and sure enough, in large separated type and printed with a special importance, was the statement that the Indian Loan was concluded, Battersea's as the house of issue was hinted at but not defined; and the announcement that one-half of the loan was set aside for relief works was made with due solemnity and with humanitarian congratulations.

There was a leader on it of course, and Dolly read that leader as hard as though it were a French novel. He even noted the style and discovered in it a hand different from that of your general journalist. He knew what was coming!

Journal after journal, as he opened each, had the news (or an emphatic contradiction of it). The *Moon* deplored, the *Eagle* scoffed at, the *Repartee* joked about the decision of the Government, but the decision was there. And what was worse, an allusion in the *Herald* compelled him to turn to the money column. Whatever had been sent to the papers had been communicated the night before. The money columns of the morning papers could not reflect it. The evening papers

would show what was up. He turned to the early edition of the *Moon* more anxiously, and sure enough, the thing had happened. The premier security was firmer ; and it was firmer, the City editor of the *Moon* was happy to add, “ from a certitude in the City that the Indian Loan, which might have made too great a demand upon the market, was now known to be secured upon works which public opinion had demanded for the highest and noblest of reasons, but which, on the lower ground of finance, were really necessary to its success.”

There are some departments of human life in which politicians are practised, and even acute—and Dolly perceived, long before he had finished his reading, that Mr. Smith’s departure was known. He perceived with an equal clearness and an added bitterness that the Duke of Battersea was privy to that departure. If Peggy was still at the Battersea’s as she had been the day before, there was not much time to lose.

He was at the telephone again in no time, . . . Oh, the weary business ! But (curious coincidence !) Battersea House was first engaged, then it would not reply, then he was given a wrong number. He binged up there at top speed in a taxi—it was quicker than telephoning. Peggy was not there ; she had gone out. And

the Duke ? The Duke was in the City. And the Duchess ? Nobody could tell him.

The evening papers were out. The tapes in the Club were all agog, all that is great in London, all that drinks, gambles and intrigues, was thoroughly awake. And it all shouted of the Indian Loan. Dolly felt in the great square hall of his Club one pair of eyes after another seeking him as he glanced at the telegrams. He went out and walked eastward, but even as he bought a paper the man asked him to make it tuppence ; thereby proving the American adage that publicity is the thorn in the roseleaf bed of greatness. He could not even get across Trafalgar Square without two policemen making way for him ; and he thought most miserably as he went, that all his splendour was tied upon a string. He popped on to a bus that was going towards the City and was at last at ease. In Fleet Street no one would know him, and he could continue on foot. He opened the paper at random—the habit was growing upon him—he recognised in the yellow colour the organ of the Straights, cultivated, international and insipid. The leading article praised him. It said that for once Dolly “ had acted without ambiguity, and as the country demanded that her leader, by whatever accident he might have obtained his position, should act. We had duties to India as great as

our rights. . . . Dusky fellow-subjects . . . conscience of Europe. . . . The determination to ear-mark half the new loan for relief works ” —and the rest of it ! “ No mere pauperisation, but useful labour and honest, reproductive experiment . . . ! ”

“ O Lord ! ” groaned Dolly in spirit. He thought how all these things get worse with every passing hour. If Smith could be back here now, it would be bad enough ; if he could not get him back till to-morrow it would be worse ; the day after to-morrow might be ruin.

The bus had reached Fleet Street. The Prime Minister cautiously hopped off.

He hopped off the bus in Fleet Street to go into the Temple and talk to his solicitor. Even the greatest men in our variegated and spontaneous public life find many interests besides those which distinguish them before the crowd. And Dolly, quite apart from his political position, found interest and occupation in the consideration of his fortune.

Since his marriage one or two little arrangements had had to be made from time to time, and Peggy had also had to consult her lawyers in connection with them. The husband and wife understood each other perfectly, and Peggy had immediately consented after her marriage to put her affairs into the same hands as his. How

delighted, therefore, was not Dolly to find when he walked into the waiting-room of the lawyer's office that Peggy, in another enormous hat, and mauve to-day, whereas only yesterday she had been blue, was sitting there looking at a pile of old illustrated papers. There was a look of pleasure on her face as she recognised him, and he was genuinely glad to see her, though he wondered at the office's discourtesy in keeping a woman of her position waiting. It is very difficult for people who count in modern England to express such petty injuries. Dolly got near it by asking Peggy whether she was waiting for somebody who was upstairs. Peggy answered by saying :

“ For that matter, why are they keeping *you* waiting ? They might have known it was you ! You don't know how like yourself you look, Dolly ! ”

Then they both laughed.

They were skirting on the edge of that most dangerous of subjects, the deference due from the middle class to its superiors. They were hinting at it in little phrases that they only used to each other, the husband and the wife, when a stammering lad came in sweating with fear and said Mr. Crump was exceedingly annoyed, and wished to say how sorry he was. And would not Peggy come up *at once* ? There had been a misunderstanding !

Peggy, simply remarking "I've won, dear," swept upstairs, and Dolly, who had never been very fond of funny things and who had latterly got very tired of the world, funny or unfunny, could not help smiling. He was the more amused when two minutes after the stammering lad came in again, worse than ever, was pushed aside by a big black-bearded fellow of great assurance and command, who said :

"It's all a mistake, sir, it's all a terrible mistake. Mr. Crump particularly wishes me to say that it is a mistake." And the painful incident was luckily closed by the ring of Peggy's voice from the top of the stairs telling Dolly to come up, it was something they could discuss together. Dolly was relieved ; he hated business.

As the result of that little interview both husband and wife were somewhat wealthier when they left the office. There had not passed one of those painful discussions of which the end must be loss to one party and an advantage to the other. They had agreed together upon a step which would raise the value of at least one investment and probably of two. Now when people find themselves a little wealthier they also find themselves commonly (for the moment) a little better tempered and more at ease with their kind.

Dolly and Peggy walked back together down

to the Embankment, leaving the office through a sort of hedge of obsequious dependents. Any one seeing them side by side would have taken them for brother and sister, save indeed that the difference in race was very apparent in their faces. If not for brother and sister, the casual observer would at least have taken them for two very close, long acquainted and very intimate friends, and he would not have been far wrong. For there was a sympathy between Dolly and his wife which is but too rarely found in the married lives of the wealthier classes to-day. And whenever Peggy was in London it made a difference to Dolly if he could not see her once or twice in the week. It was a consolation and a pleasure to him when in her busy life she could arrange to go to the same house-party with him from a Saturday to a Monday.

People knew this, and sometimes asked them together. Their affection was common talk.

They chatted together of everything except the one point upon which there was danger of a quarrel—the Dissolution; she thought that she was avoiding politics when she told him the funny story of seeing old Smith for a moment—she was positive it *was* old Smith—in Pickles' forty-eight hours before. "He wanted a Rat-tailed Spoon that the Batterseas used to have—in their

villa—near Villefranche.” She spoke of old Smith’s mania and laughed at it.

They had got as far as Cleopatra’s Needle during their walk westward, when Peggy said this ; and hardly had she said it when Dolly stopped dead in his walk, looked her full in the face as though he was going to ask her another question ; he had suddenly been given the key for which he had been waiting, and he was suddenly illumined ! Old Smith had bolted to Villefranche.

“ Oh, *do* come on, don’t stand there like a gawk,” said Peggy.

Dolly came on obediently enough, but he was absorbed, the pleasant stream of his talk was checked, and Peggy got bored with him. It was one of the annoyances of her married life that on those occasions when she met her husband and was alone with him, even when they were accidental, there was always some ending of this sort ; he got interested in things she didn’t understand, and his mind drifted away from what she was saying. She hailed a taxi, and said rather abruptly as she got into it : “ Where shall I drop you ? ”

And Dolly asked, since there was no time to lose, and he had no fear of her putting two and two together, to be dropped at Pongo’s.

They were gloomy in the taxi ; she was really

annoyed with him. Of course he was an old man ; she knew that when she married him ; but his way of getting suddenly abstracted like a dreamy child was really very irritating ! She dropped him at Pongo's and thought no more about it.

Dolly was thinking as hard as he could. He was in one of those moods when men are certain that things will go in their favour ; he had the key to open his trouble with and he was confident that every detail would fit in. He should find Pongo at home . . . and so he did.

Pongo was standing before the fire in his study, thinking profoundly of nothing. Or, rather, to do him justice, he was reflecting whether he should stroll through the Park and go and call on Biddy Limerick at the risk of meeting the old, intolerably old, Limerick there as well, or whether he should go and look at the French pictures in Dover Street. The statesman had not fully made up his mind between those two policies when Dolly came in with an eagerness very rare in politicians and full of reality. Dolly's message was simple ; he told Pongo that Mr. Smith was on the Riviera, and must be found at once.

“ How do you mean ‘ found ’ ? ” said Pongo, fixing him with his square face.

“ What I say,” said Dolly “ found. He's

gone off on his mania—there's a relic of Disraeli's" added Dolly bitterly, "and he's gone off to fetch it."

"Oh!" said Pongo—now understanding half the business. "But he'll come back, I suppose?"

"Oh, I don't suppose he'll *die* there," snapped Dolly impatiently. "The point is, some one's got to go and *find* him. Now! At once!"

"Well, a boy messenger could do that," said Pongo, "or Cavan, the man who spotted Jenny Hampton in the Balearics when little Coolie Diggs bolted with her last June." And Pongo chuckled.

"My dear fellow," said Dolly, his nerves more at a stretch than ever, "whoever finds that old scarecrow has got to be some one who knows why he's wanted. There are only two people just now who do know that; one's you and the other's me."

"Ye-es," said Pongo, not yet seeing things clearly.

"Well, hang it all, *I* can't go," said Dolly.

"No-o," said Pongo, "no, you can't go."

"I *would* go," said Dolly, greatly relieved to hear Pongo's opinion on this, "if it wasn't for the Glasgow engagement; but that's *absolutely* essential. I've got to Damn the Pope."

"Well, for that matter," said Pongo, who did

not relish the idea of a long journey at a moment's notice, "I've got to answer your speech the very next day at Stirling." He pompously fumbled with some papers and said: "Look here." He pointed to the first sentence, typewritten: "The Prime Minister has been guilty of an act which I think no other responsible statesman in our time," &c. &c.

"Oh yes," said Dolly impatiently.

"Well, I dare say," said Pongo in an injured tone, "but I've got it all ready, and I was going to let you see it; there's a passage where I called you the associate if not the accomplice of thieves and murderers, I thought your Press might think that too strong and I wanted you to revise it."

"Oh well, anyhow," broke in Dolly, "don't bother *now*. The point is, one of us two has got to go and it can't be me."

Poor Pongo got gloomier and gloomier as the force of circumstances compelled him to Dolly's view.

"What about the Stirling people?" he said.

"Send Eddie's brother," said Dolly carelessly. "He's on your side. Send anybody. But *you* can't go. I'll put off the end of the recess for a week. But oh, my dear fellow, if you go you must go *now*. I don't know how long

it'll take you to find him, but every hour counts."

And Pongo consented; he was given Villefranche for cue, and the whole story of the Disraeli Spoon for a scent, and he departed . . . so greatly did he love his country!

CHAPTER XIII

“The difference between English judicial procedure and that of the Continent is, that in England a man is presumed innocent until he is found guilty, while on the Continent he is presumed guilty until he is proved innocent.”—ADOLF BECK.

THE Juge d’Instruction of Tarascon was an extremely neat gentleman close upon fifty years of age. The top of his head was bald; his beard was thin and pointed; his eyes, which though alert in expression gave an impression of physical fatigue, he aided by the use of a gold pince-nez. His salary was small, his private fortune considerable, and his importance in the place more considerable still.

Before this being, the arbiter of his fate, was the aged G. Quinlan Smith dragged by his rude warders in the early morning of Whit-Wednesday. Far off on that same morning the express from Lyons was bearing southward on his mission Pongo, the saviour of his country; in the pocket of the somnolent Pongo was a ticket for Villefranche.

When the poor old banker, wretched and

shivering after his night in the cells, was ushered into the presence of this official he felt all at once a sentiment of well-being which had been very far from him indeed during all that trying time. The room, though plainly furnished, was the room of a cultivated man, and the Juge d'Instruction had even permitted himself certain ornaments upon his official table, one of which was the portrait of his wife (for he was uxorious) and another a little silver model of a motor-car mounted on marble, which he used as a paper-weight.

He begged G. Quinlan to be seated ; he did so with a sort of dry impersonal courtesy which raised him immensely in the American millionaire's esteem. It was such miles away from the rudeness and the pushing and the shouting of those other execrable Latins ! Indeed, G. Quinlan Smith had not known that such good manners existed outside the Anglo-Saxon world.

The Juge d'Instruction was consulting a sheaf of papers that lay before him. The official interpreter, a large beefy man who was also a small professor of the place, sat squarely at the end of the table eyeing the aged hoary culprit with grave distrust. The Juge d'Instruction asked him rapidly in a low voice whether the old gentleman had given any signs of knowing French.

The official interpreter shrugged his broad shoulders, and answered back as rapidly and in as low a tone that the old fellow was manifestly acquainted with the tongue as was proved by his travel and his association with men who could only speak French, but that he himself had not heard him speak a word of the language. Through all this George Quinlan sat stolid.

Then the Juge d'Instruction, his eyes bent soberly upon the papers before him, began to speak in a rapid monotone ; and this is what he said :

“ Warned One !

“ On the 13th of April, 1851, you escaped from a kind and careful mother, a widow, I may add, who lived modestly upon a small pension in the town of Bourges, and you did not hesitate to take with you a piece of plate which should have been the more sacred to you as it was presented to your late father, a worthy station-master, upon his retiring from service.

“ Your mother, unable to control your undisciplined temper, begged that you might be placed in a reformatory, where you were taught a useful trade until the time had come for your military service. But all the care and aptitude of your masters were thrown away, for even as you were being led with your companions to draw lots before the Military Council, you escaped, and

were next discovered three years later connected with a burglary in the town of Auxerre. It was," added the Juge d'Instruction, looking up with a steely glance, "your specialisation on plate which ruined you upon that occasion." He begged the interpreter to translate.

The interpreter, in a slow and halting fashion, and in a wholly unrecognisable accent, put the main facts into the English of Tarascon. George Quinlan Smith uttered not a word.

"You still simulate deafness?" said the Juge d'Instruction with pale severity.

"What?" said George Quinlan, putting his hand up to his ear, "you must talk louder!"

"The law compels me," said the Juge d'Instruction with great dignity to the interpreter, "to admit a Warned One's claim. You will be good enough therefore to shout clearly the main points into the ear of the Warned One."

The official interpreter did as he was bid. From ten sentences of which G. Quinlan could make nothing, he boiled it down to one, and at last in desperation wrote down in imperfect English and bellowed again in English even more imperfect, ". . . Broke leave away from mother in 1851."

"Nonsense!" said G. Quinlan testily, "nonsense!"

The burglary at Auxerre was equally vehe-

mently denied. The denial and a rapid summary of what had been asked and answered were then read out and presented for signature to G. Quinlan, but he would not sign. He said snap-pishly that, if they were hunting autographs any, he'd do a deal if they'd let up on the other things.

The interpreter, hearing this, remarked to the Juge d'Instruction that the prisoner was taking refuge in English thieves' slang, which it was impossible for a classical scholar like himself to follow. The Juge d'Instruction sighed and continued :

“ You were then condemned to five years' penal servitude, and on appealing to the Superior Court at Sens your sentence was doubled and sojournment was interdicted to you during a period of five years, while your civic rights were similarly forfeited for ten. In addition,” proceeded the Juge d'Instruction with more emphasis than he had hitherto shown, “ you were struck with a fine of fifteen francs.” He looked up. “ Do you still deny ? ”

Old G. Quinlan Smith so far forgot himself as to say “ Rats ! ” The interpreter shook his head uneasily ; he did not follow.

“ What does he say ? ” asked the Juge d'Instruction gravely.

“ His thieves' slang again,” muttered the

interpreter—too conscious of the lawyer's doubting eye.

“When you were restored to society,” continued the imperturbable magistrate in his grave monotone, “having purged your pain, your first act was to murder, under the most brutal circumstances, an aged woman in Nogent-le-Rotrou, *where again her SILVER formed part of your booty.* With this you escaped. You appear to have been in hiding under a false name in the British Colonies, in the United States of America, and in London for many years, and when the period of criminal limitation was past you returned to France in the year 1921. Translate,” he added, turning to the interpreter.

The interpreter went through his halting performance again, there was the same shouting, the same writing down, and the same vigorous denial from G. Quinlan, which now took the form of suggesting that his tormentors would have been better employed in rounding up larrikins and speakeasies than monkeying with his particular buzz-saw.

Upon the interpreter despairing of this prose, the Juge d'Instruction was moved to a slight reprimand, which that gentleman met by suggesting that the old fellow was merely talking gibberish, and was not even talking the thieves' slang at first used. He was even at the pains of

consulting a pocket dictionary, but though the words "round," "speak," "easy," "saw," and "monkey" were all easily discoverable in their usual signification, he could make nothing of the synthesis into which the millionaire had thrown them.

"I come now," said the Juge d'Instruction, "to the most serious part of what you must listen to. The law warns you to pay the greatest attention. It is constant that during the last five years you have been accessory to a series of robberies, of which your accomplice and perhaps your dupe was the more active agent; you worked in company with two other robbers, a male and a female, now happily dead, who perished in an accident upon the Nice-Mentone Road during one of the more audacious of their thefts. *Part of the product of this last, a SILVER spoon, was discovered upon your person.* It is further constant that in order to avoid examination you affect deafness. The ear-trumpet which you carried with this purpose, found upon the road of your flight, was the chief clue which led to your arrest. You wear gloves in order to prevent the chance of your being traced by thumb-marks. You pretend an ignorance of the French tongue and, by claiming a foreign origin, seek to throw a veil over your blood-stained career."

G. Quinlan Smith, not understanding a word of all this, implored his interlocutor, who was now looking up at him, to quit fooling.

“You still deny,” continued the Juge d’Instruction, “but your denials will avail you nothing.”

Once more the paper was handed for G. Quinlan Smith to sign, and once more he refused to do so. He was standing up, and so was the interpreter. Two policemen were brought to lead the Warned One away, when the Juge d’Instruction motioned them to wait a moment, pulled down a fat cardboard-covered book from a shelf, looked up Article 3773A of his Procedure, and read in a louder tone :

“In the presence of . . .” He pointed to one of the policemen, who answered “Sorel, Jacques,” in a military attitude. “And of . . .” went on the Juge d’Instruction pointing to the second of the policemen, who said “Bietry, Jules,” in the same attitude. “And of Henri Désprès, interpreter to this court, and of myself; the Warned One having refused to sign, considered Article 3773A of the Code of Procedure, the . . .” and here he fumbled in the index for a few moments, put his finger into three or four places of the fat book, and then continued: “Decree of the tenth Germinal of the year six, the Senatus-consultum of the

10th of December 1805, the Organic Law of the 6th of January 1848, and the Police Orders of the 10th of March 1883, and of the 4th of June 1876, I . . . &c. &c., constitute the Warned One a Prisoner this . . . day of . . . 1925 to answer to the charges of contumacy, rebellion against constituted authority, and defiance of the laws of the Republic."

With these words the excellent magistrate heaved a deep sigh, replaced the volume, and George Quinlan Smith was led away.

The poor old man had reached the breaking-point. He must get out of this; even at the price of letting the profane world know all about the spoon, he must get out of it. He bethought him and beckoned to the interpreter.

"Ah, at last, I thought as much," muttered that worthy provincial scholar.

G. Quinlan Smith leaned towards him as he went out of the door behind his jailers. "Would you mind sending a telegram for me?" he said.

The interpreter communicated the question to the Juge d'Instruction, whose first business it was to answer. "Is it normal English, M. Désprès?"

"No," said M. Désprès, with the assurance of a scholar, "the accent is not normal and the words are too conversational and familiar for the circumstances."

“ But it makes sense ? ” said the Juge d’Instruction, who in his heart of hearts believed that G. Quinlan knew even less of English than the interpreter.

“ Oh yes ! it makes sense,” said the professor proudly. “ He spoke of his mind and a telegram.”

The Juge d’Instruction saw his opportunity ; he called the prisoner back.

“ Prisoner,” he said (carefully avoiding the honorific term “ Warned One ” which he had previously been so careful to respect), “ you desire to send a telegram ? ”

The translation of this was first spoken and then, as he remained stolid, shouted into the ear of G. Quinlan, who said he did.

“ Write it upon this and I will see that it is sent,” said the impassable magistrate, handing him a sheet of stamped paper.

G. Quinlan wrote : “ Mary Smith, 207 Charles Street, Mayfair, London. Send legal aid at once. Dangerous misunderstanding. Poste Restante, Tarascon. Uncle.”

The interpreter interpreted. The Juge d’Instruction shook his head. “ You will be good enough to date it, sir, from the prison,” he said. “ I will not transmit the signature, ‘ Uncle ’ ; it is perhaps a code word. I must, if you please, have your signature : all the names please, or it will not be legal.”

There was a touch of sullenness in the old gentleman as he capitulated and wrote "G. Quinlan Smith" in broad letters.

"I will see that it is delivered," said the Juge d'Instruction in his dry tone, and G. Quinlan was led out.

Hardly had the door shut behind him when the magistrate, with a very large magnifying-glass of low power, was carefully scrutinising that signature, and deciding from his considerable experience that it *was* the signature of some person not French. The "th" was enough to prove it. It was the "th" of some one to whom that combination of letters was as familiar as the letter "e" or the letter "a." Of course the man might have used the false name so often as to have made it a mechanical thing for his fingers, but then again the type of handwriting was foreign. It had a boldness about it which the Juge d'Instruction, if you had asked him, would have said was theatrical, but which at any rate was not of the sort that you get in the sloping hands of his own countrymen. He pondered a long time over the telegram; he then locked it into a drawer and decided to see a colleague on the matter on his way home to lunch and to talk it over with him.

Meanwhile, G. Quinlan Smith, no longer a Warned One, but a true Prisoner, languished

in the jail of Tarascon under precisely the same discomforts as had afflicted him when he had been not a vile Prisoner but a proud Warned One, and technically innocent, technically free.

In the early afternoon, at about three o'clock, he was summoned once again to meet his judge.

CHAPTER XIV

HIS LORDSHIP : " Was it an Irish bull ? "

WITNESS : " No, my lord, it was an ordinary bull ; that is, it was not a bull at all. It was a bullock. "

HIS LORDSHIP : " Take care, witness ! Take very great care ! "

Court of Crown Cases Reserved, III. J. II. 327 (1892).

THE station at Tarascon is old-fashioned and incommodious. The long process of European development has so affected the town that it is a junction where the unworthy must wait for many hours, for so the Gallic temperament decrees.

Had Pongo not fuddled his naturally bright wits by years of the Commons' froust he might have found in his time-table a train which would have got him to the Riviera without changing. He blundered in this as men so fuddled blunder in every other matter ; and Pongo, much at the same hour in which, in that same town, G. Quinlan was first suffering the judge's question, found himself on the platform of the station at Tarascon, bundled out of the train which he fondly hoped would have taken

him to the Coast of Azure, but which, contrariwise, turned out to be the Train of Luxury bound to the other side of the Rhône : the train whose mission it is to bring home from the too virile north the wealthy Huguenots of Nîmes and the still wealthier Jews of Barcelona.

It was borne in on Pongo that outside his own country nothing was really well managed. If this railway junction had been in England, there would have been a large station, and barmaids and a bookstall with any number of papers on it, all beautifully printed on nice thick paper, and in a language one could understand. And there would have been any number of porters running about and shouting, "By your leave!" Such surroundings (he thought) were native to Man when Man waits in a station for a train, but it was ridiculous to be hung up for three hours in a place like *this*; and Pongo in his haste was ready to blame the whole of continental civilisation and to desire its immediate conquest, absorption and transformation by a worthier race.

Pongo marvelled what could be done with three hours before one in a place like Tarascon. It occurred to him to ask whether he might be shown over the house of Tartarin, but he was not quite certain whether that character were historical or no. He mooned out of the station

and stood on a little dirty square outside. He was at a loose end.

In some ways, in spite of his annoyance, Pongo found the sensation not wholly unpleasant, for though your politician enjoys great intervals of leisure, these are usually to be found between the hours of eight in the evening and three in the morning, when he is dining, drinking and gambling with his friends. It is rare that this feeling of freedom comes to him in the afternoon. Anyhow, there he was, stuck between two trains, and nothing for it but to pass the time.

He sauntered down the broad, tree-lined boulevard, flattering himself that no one would take him for anything but a native, with his dark hair and his other physical peculiarities. He forgot that his collar betrayed him, and also that indefinable habit of treating by gesture the rest of the human race as one's inferiors, which, while it adds such strength to the character of our gentry, is also a mark most difficult to obliterate, and has indeed proved the ruin of many who have fled from the police of the Motherland.

As he was wondering what to do to fill up the time, his eyes were met by an enormous poster.

It represented a bull. The bull was pictured

of a bright cardinal red ; it was standing in a definite attitude, so well drawn that its tail actually seemed to be moving through the air ; its eyes were troubled but courageous. In front of him a Spanish gentleman in the last extremes of costume was striking an attitude as graceful as it was professional, and with a pointed instrument defied the Dreadful Beast. He also was pictured entirely in cardinal red, while in the background of the poster faint indications, red also, hinted at enormous numbers delirious with the pathos and danger of that struggle. The poster bore a legend that a bull-fight had been permitted by the authorities under the regulations of the laws of 1889 and 1891 and would take place that afternoon in the Ring of Sports outside the town.

A little shamefacedly Pongo took his way, after an inquiry from a passer-by, towards the Ring of Sports.

He told himself that the great reform upon which the best, the bravest of England were now bent, could but be aided by a personal experience upon his part. He was determined to see the horrible thing, and he thought himself man enough not only to bear it but to note exactly in what it was most horrible.

A little pardonable personal ambition was, perhaps, present in his mind. He thought of

himself (as his short legs twinkled towards the high wooden wall of the Ring of Sports) speaking during the Foreign Office vote upon this disgrace to European civilisation. He would ask Dolly to allow that vote to occupy more than the usual four hours in the year. Dolly might even allow two days, and he would coach Dolly in things that could be said from Dolly's side of the House in agreement. He remembered how the House liked detailed personal knowledge, and he knew himself well enough to recognise how very much better his speeches sounded when they dealt with a subject of which he had at least some faint adumbration of knowledge. He had recognised this in the speeches of others also; and altogether, as he passed the ticket-office and paid his franc, he was a little elated. He was about to learn great things.

He had come at the right moment, at least as far as the spectacle was concerned. The audience was, perhaps, a little disappointing. The rising oval tiers of wooden seats were not more than a third filled, and he had a suspicion (as he looked at the bored faces of one segment numbered "S") that these were employés of the company compelled to swell the attendance. For the rest, the few hundreds present were mainly respectable families, among whom

comfortable matrons were in the majority, accompanied by their lively offspring.

At the moment when he took his place the bull, or, to speak more accurately, the bullock, was standing in a sheepish attitude in the middle of the arena, looking not unlike a medical student who approaches his examiners for oral questions. The dumb beast had his eyes modestly fixed upon the ground, his tail hung limp, and there seemed to be added to his obvious embarrassment a touch of boredom.

Four gentlemen in faded and parti-coloured velvet designed after the fashions of the fifteenth century and by no means sufficient for the glaring southern daylight, appeared at the great gates at one end of the arena and blew faint and discordant notes upon four long trumpets, one of which had been badly battered during the transit of the company from Arles. At this sound, which, though not prolonged, was offensive, the bullock turned its head and bellowed in protest. Its little horns were capped with large erections of cork, on each of which fluttered a knot of gay ribbons. Having uttered this protest the animal relapsed into its former moody silence.

When all these things were accomplished, the cavalcade entered the arena. It was numerous, poverty-stricken, and many members of it

a little ill-tempered. Pongo, to whom the amusements of our continental friends and rivals were unfamiliar, was astonished to note that the ladies, dressed in various ancient fashions which recalled, though faintly, the frescoes of the Houses of Parliament, had, though it was broad daylight, covered their faces with white paint exactly as did ladies in London for dinner; while the gentlemen were not only insipid in their horsemanship, but many of them indifferent to the condition of their beards: all save one! He was a magnificent creature in tights and little velvet drawers, with a square, curly head and challenging crescented moustachios; he caused his horse to waltz in a surprising fashion, rode gaily with loud shouts round and round the bullock, galloped through the open doors and disappeared, never to return.

The cavalcade passed drearily round the oval, bowing and smiling in a perfunctory manner to the stolid matrons of Tarascon, not one of whom replied by eyelid or lip; they disappeared in turn through the open doors, which clanged upon them; the men with trumpets wheezed out another flourish; two hobbledehoys in the audiencé full of beans shouted "Assez! Assez!" and were promptly reprimanded by their mammas. Four gallant footmen were left to challenge the Monster from the ground, while two horsemen

armed with considerable and over-heavy lances sat as a sort of half-backs behind the firing-line ;—and the dreadful game began !

Of the footmen, Number One, dancing with agility first to the left and then to the right, ended by pricking the bullock, who lost his temper and ran at him. Number Two took advantage of the open flank, pricked the bullock again but on the other side. The bullock in a confused temper (for this animal has no power of analysis) stood sullenly trying to make out why a flea had bitten him on both sides. He had not solved this problem when Number Three caught him on the crupper, and Number Four tickled him, as he turned to inquire, above the shoulder. The bullock could make nothing of all this. Or rather, he made too much of it. He stood still again to consider, and Pongo was pleased to see for the first time (as the signs of the beginning of action) a slight lashing of the animal's tail.

The four footmen meanwhile re-formed at the other end of the oval, the two horsemen attempted to persuade, and at last compelled, their mounts to shamble up to new positions behind the re-formed line, and the mad joust began again.

But this time athletic properties were discovered in the warriors. Each of the four footmen vaulted over the back of the bullock by

the aid of his pointed stave, each after such an accomplishment kissed his hand to some one of the matrons, who looked neither pleased nor annoyed, but stolid as she received the compliment; and each actor having so acted, regained his place.

In the third act the four footmen separated to the four cardinal points of the bullock, and from north, south, east, and west provoked his adolescent rage. The bullock in response moved heavily here and there, now and then gratifying the audience, and above all the management, by a very passable bellow, while his four opponents chasséd one before the other, gave little cries in the Limousin dialect (which can so easily be made to pass for Castilian) and, to add to the gaiety of the scene, the two horsemen, by dint of beating their mounts with the butts of their spears, provoked them to a sort of lumbering canter round and round the oval.

The bullock—unused to such exercise, and irritated by the fluttering of large red cloths which had been his constant companions for many months and which bored him (if bullocks ever weep) to tears—bellowed quite angrily and positively gambolled in his now excited mood. The footmen called him gently by his pet name as they passed, but for the public ear they more loudly challenged him to action, leapt gracefully

into the air and performed prodigies of agility round and round his desperate hide ; while the horsemen, so far as the fatigue of their poor steeds would let them, continued their circling of the sand.

Just as the whole scheme was at its climax of energy, the four gentlemen in plush came out again with their trumpets ; exuberant, happy and youthful laughter met them from the children of the Tarasconese. The adolescents in the audience who had been previously reprimanded, gave an imitation of trumpets, on which their mammas deigned this time to smile. Two valets dressed after the fashion of the eighteenth century, but with faces of the twentieth, collared the bullock and led him out on ribbons. The four footmen formed up behind and the two horsemen were the last to leave the arena. As the procession filed out, the trumpets attempted to play the Soldiers' March in *Faust*, and failed.

Then (as a large placard announced) was to come the Feast of Flowers, and Pongo rose. He looked at his watch ; he had half an hour to take the train.

Pongo was not an original man, nor a creative man, nor even a heavy thinker. Pongo could not write prose ; it was as much as he could do to read it with any intelligence. He could not paint, or draw, or model a statue, or design a

boat, or do any piece of carpentering, nor could he sew, or sweep a room, or cook ; he could not do any mortal thing. He was therefore a poor student of human affairs. But even he felt in his heart that something had gone wrong that day ; he had not, so to speak, got hold of any " stuff " to denounce. He was sorry for the bullock, but he was not sorry in the right way. To his shame be it said he was really more sorry for the men, and he had been wondering whether they were paid enough, and whether they got enough to eat.

The scene haunted him as he twinkled his way to the station on his short legs and swinging his long arms. They did look so sad and so miserable ! He found himself remembering his few months at the Board of Works, and how he had really bothered about contractors giving proper wages. He had almost forgotten the bullock when the magnificent poster struck him again on the walls, with its cardinal-coloured Sire of the Herd, its superb undaunted eyes and leonine tail.

" Damn the fat beast ! " he said. " I shall have to make everything up ! "

Now to make up things when you know just a little about them is very difficult for a politician, and Pongo's eyes were turned inward as he mused on that problem, when they turned outward again to note the approach along the hot street of a singular procession.

Half a dozen men, dressed for the most part as labourers, and shuffling doggedly along, were guarded by four policemen who flanked them upon either side. At the head of the group two other policemen led, arm linked in arm, a very aged, handcuffed man, whose attitude and gait betrayed an exasperation which was turning into despair. This old gentleman was very differently dressed from the others, and Pongo seemed to recognise if not a fellow-countryman, at any rate some one dressed as a human being should dress. The tramp of the policemen and the shuffling of the rest came closer, and Pongo's blood boiled to see among them, treated with peculiar roughness, a large and vigorous woman. Pongo stood to watch the group go by, and was for a second or two unable to believe his eyes. Then he gave a loud shout. The old gentleman was—there could be no doubt of it—G. Quinlan Smith! The words inspired by his emotion, if not well chosen, at least came straight from the heart :

“ Arraytay ! Arraytay ! ” he shouted, as he ran up to them upon his insufficient shanks. “ Vous avvay lar une homme traize important ! ”

The two leading policemen stopped and stared, the rear of the column bunched up against its head, one of the humbler prisoners tried to make a bolt of it, was caught and thrown ; and altogether the scramble and confusion did nothing

to improve the temper of the officials. The Brigadier, who was leading the whole, asked Pongo in the coarsest terms what he was at and whether he was mad.

Pongo continued to insist the more volubly as his French got weaker and his vocabulary disappeared.

“Cay tray dangerur !” he shouted, the while G. Quinlan vigorously added his corroboration :

“You believe that gen’leman !” he said in tones which began to be menacing as he recovered his courage at the sight of a friend. “Yer’ll find out what damfool means if yer don’t !”

All he got for his pains was a sharp jerk such as ought never to be administered to a man of his age, while the Brigadier, sternly fixing Pongo with his eye, shouted in a tone of military command, “ROMPEZ !” At which word the ranks of the disciplined in the French Republic are accustomed to take their leave, for it is the word of dismissal. But Pongo’s alarm could make nothing of anything save the tone.

“Cer Moosieur . . .” he began, when the tall policeman got his left hand firmly into the collar of his coat and swung him sideways. Pongo had not suffered such an indignity in all his life. He struck out blindly. Two armed men pounced upon him, and before he could say Mary Robinson his hands were securely

bound behind his back. He joined the mournful procession. In a few minutes (which he occupied with loud and ineffectual protests) he found himself locked into a little cold room, with nothing in it but two chairs and a table, in the Palace of Justice, while his wretched old friend—protesting, in spite of his years, with almost equal vigour—was borne off down a corridor in which his complaints and the angry replies of his warders echoed sonorously.

Pongo passed a quarter of an hour of fury.

He was not a Cornish man for nothing, and his ancient Iberian blood was up; he kicked furiously at the door, wrenched his bound wrists behind him, and only succeeded in hurting them; not till a good twenty minutes had passed did he sit down, exhausted and sullen, and begin a meditation upon the instability of human affairs, and the rapidity with which accidents will happen in this inexplicable world.

Another quarter of an hour he so passed, relieving his feelings now and then by an angry shout not unmingled with epithets proper to the occasion. But he was to sit and kick there with his short legs for nearly an hour before the door opened and yet another policeman entered, accompanied by a figure which promised some relief to the bewildered and unhappy Chief of the Official Opposition of Great Britain.

CHAPTER XV

“It is a cruel thing to keep any animal in confinement.”—The DUCHESS OF BATTERSEA, speaking at the Woman’s Congress at Bradford, in July 1907.

THE figure which entered Pongo’s place of confinement in company with the policeman was that of a funny little old gentleman dressed in ready-made clothes, shaven after the French fashion (and rather an old fashion at that) with imperial and moustaches, and yet having about him something undeniably English. With what joy did not Pongo hear from those frenchified but native lips the simple words :

“My dear sir, my dear sir, let us see what can be done ! Calm yourself !”

“If they don’t take these beastly things off my hands . . .” spluttered Pongo.

“Certainly, my dear sir, certainly,” said the little old doctor (for such was the stranger’s profession), making no sort of movement or suggestion that might support his words. “But calm yourself ! pray calm yourself ! No good comes of violence !”

“Tell that fellow to undo my hands,” said Pennybunt doggedly.

“Certainly !” said the little doctor nervously, “certainly ! By all means !” He turned and spoke a few words in excellent French to the policeman, who only shook his head and said that he had no orders. “My dear sir,” said the little doctor again, “it is no doubt all a misunderstanding. But calm yourself. These paroxysms”—for at this point the Iberian blood in Pennybunt was again rising—“these paroxysms only excite further suspicion. I have no doubt we shall be able to explain all—explain all,” he nodded genially. “The place is strange to you, and you have perhaps taken something which has disturbed you. Come, come !”

“Will you or will you not,” shouted Pongo, “tell him to take these damned things off my hands ?” Then suddenly losing all the hypocrisy and reserve which is so necessary a part of his trade, he looked the little doctor full in the eye and said in a lower and concentrated tone : “*Do you know who I am ?*”

“Certainly,” said the little doctor, quite at random, and with a terrified look. “Certainly. Calm yourself, my dear sir, calm yourself.” He fully expected his enraged fellow-countryman to announce that he was the Emperor of China or the creator of the universe. He had experience

in such cases . . . sometimes they were only temporary . . . the hot sun of the south, and the rough wine and so forth.

“My name,” said Pongo, in a solemn voice to which he lent as much dignity as years of intrigue permitted him, “my name is Pennybunt.”

“By all means,” said the little doctor soothingly, “by all means.”

“But, you silly old fool . . .” shouted Pennybunt.

“Oh, my dear sir,” said the doctor, half rising from his seat and putting up a deprecating hand.

“Yes, but you *are* a silly old fool,” said Pennybunt, a little more reasonably. “You’re an Englishman, and you find another Englishman whom you are sent, I suppose, to interrogate; you find him in a hole, and you go on talking like a nurse in a hospital. I tell you my name is Pennybunt.”

“By all means,” said the old doctor again.

“What on earth has ‘by all means’ to do with it?” snapped Pongo angrily. “I am Mr. Pennybunt, the Member of Parliament,” he added, for the hypocrisy of a lifetime was still too strong upon him to permit him to tell the whole truth at once, and to say that he was that Pennybunt who had been Home Secretary for so many years, and before that at the India Office, that he was the Leader of the Official Opposition, that it

was the intention of the Party Game to make him Prime Minister in about three years, and that in general if he was badly treated he could make it hot for people.

“The Member of Parliament!” said the little doctor, opening his eyes. “Not a relative of the Mr. Pennybunt, the leader of my party?”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘your’ party,” began Pongo, “but . . .”

“My family,” broke in the little doctor with great dignity, “have always been strongly opposed to the National Programme!”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Pennybunt. “Have they? Well, if you want to know, I am the Leader of the Opposition.”

The little doctor looked at him more curiously. This was better than the Emperor of China, but on the other hand it might be more complicated.

“Yes, Mr. Pennybunt,” he said with great courtesy, “certainly.” Then he added in that subtle mixture of deference and caution which marks your professional man when he fears that trusting too little may land him in as big a hole as trusting too much: “My dear Mr. Pennybunt, everything shall be done, everything. Pray let me know, however, exactly what has happened; exactly what has happened.”

“What has happened,” said Pennybunt, recovering his judgment and speaking with

emphasis and precision, "is that these tomfools of police have arrested Mr. Smith, the American financier, heaven only knows why ; that I met him as he was being dragged handcuffed between two warders through the streets of this town where I happened to be waiting for a train ; that I tried to explain to them their error in French, a language which I happily possess, and that their only reply was to commit"—and here his temper rose again—"an assault, sir, an assault, sir, this would never be *tolerated* . . ."

"Certainly ! Certainly !" said the little doctor, interrupting him, "I fully see—I fully understand ! Doubtless, Mr. Pennybunt, you have a card upon you ? I would not insist," he continued rapidly, "save that these people with whom I have—ahem—passed much of my life (I practise in this town, sir, I have a French degree, sir), these people attach great importance to visiting-cards."

"Get him to unbind my hands," said Pennybunt doggedly.

"By all means," said the little doctor, "it'll take a few minutes."

And while Pennybunt fumed, he wrote upon a scrap of paper, the policeman shouted down the corridor for a colleague, the message was borne away, and shortly afterwards yet another policeman entered, unfastened the Leader of the

Opposition's wrists, and stood by ready to fell him should he show any signs of wildness.

Pennybunt brought his stiffened arms round in front of him, looked indignantly at his swollen hands and the deep red marks round his wrists, dipped into a pocket and brought out a card-case.

"That is my card," he said, handing it to the English doctor.

The little doctor looked at it with interest, screwing up one eye and bringing the pasteboard very close to his face.

"Precisely, Mr. Pennybunt," he said, "precisely, the Athenæum Club, exactly so."

"Well," said Pennybunt, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Has Mr. Smith any proofs of his identity upon him?" asked the doctor courteously, reflecting in his own mind that Pennybunt certainly had not.

"How should I know?" snapped Pennybunt. "But if they don't let him go in double quick time there'll be trouble."

"Well," said the old gentleman, rising, "I tell you what I can do, Mr. Pennybunt. I can see first of all that *you're* all right. I'll certify you."

"What'll you certify?" said Pennybunt angrily.

"Oh no, not what you're thinking about," said

the doctor apologetically, "on the contrary, the other way about. You will be quite free, absolutely free, my dear sir. I'll explain the mistake. I'll certify you sane—quite sane. You'll go free, sir!"

Pongo fumed. "And what about Mr. Smith?" said he rather pompously.

"Well," said the little doctor, hesitating (he had been given the whole story by the magistrate), "you see, sir, it *is* a little awkward in the case of Mr. Smith. Stolen property was found upon his person."

"What!" shouted Pongo.

"My dear sir! My dear sir!" began the little doctor again in that exasperating tone which goaded Pongo beyond bearing. "Of course it's all a mistake! Doubtless some unscrupulous fellow has taken advantage of Mr. Smith—undoubtedly some unscrupulous fellow has taken advantage of Mr. Smith. But there it is. And in this country, as you know, the authorities are *so* suspicious of what they call incriminating matter!"

"What was the property?" said Pongo, bewildered.

"I understand," said the doctor, "that it was a spoon."

"O-h!" said Pennybunt. The word "spoon" let in a flood of light suddenly. He saw things

clearly now. "I think I can arrange it," he added.

It is too much the fashion to decry your House of Commons man ; I have already shown that there are occasions on which he can make a plan. Pongo made one now. He asked whether the little doctor could procure an interview between him and the aged prisoner.

"No doubt I can, only they'd want me to be there," said the doctor.

"Oh, that wouldn't matter," said Pennybunt, "that wouldn't matter at all. It would be all the better. It would convince you," he sneered.

The little doctor went off to get leave, got it, took Pennybunt along the corridor and brought him at last into the room where Mr. Smith, quite broken down with fatigue, but still sullen, was suffering further interrogations. His old face brightened a little when he saw Pongo, but it was very weary.

"Mr. Smith," bellowed Pongo with deference in the old man's ear, "will you act as I advise ? I earnestly hope you will. The situation is a very difficult one."

Mr. Smith said : "What is it ?"

"In the first place, have you got proofs of identity ?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Smith, "I showed everything to these damn fools."

“ Well, well, never mind,” shouted Pongo in a tone as soothing as one can make the top of one’s voice, “ let me see the papers.”

“ They’ve got ’em,” said Smith, jerking his pointed old chin at the judge and the interpreter, “ and they’ve got the spoon as well.”

“ Exactly,” answered Pongo. He begged leave of the Juge d’Instruction to be allowed to write down for the benefit of the old man certain words which the interpreter would guarantee. What he wrote was a suggestion. Would Mr Smith turn King’s evidence ? He had proofs of identity, the story brought up against him was ridiculous ; would he be willing to give evidence denouncing the scoundrel in feminine disguise who posed as his accomplice ?

Mr. Smith would do anything and everything to get to civilisation again out of this horror.

At his dictation the little doctor wrote down so much of the truth as could be proved by corroborative detail, and Mr. Smith cheerfully and gladly gave away, in the best traditions of Wall Street, Bertot his colleague and servitor, who after all had tried (most clumsily) to give *him* away, and deserved perhaps no mercy. But I am not writing this book to discriminate between various classes of thieves.

He indicated where the ruins of the carriage could be found, where he had met Bertot in the

train, how he was dressed, how the spoon was for sale ; he put in evidence the telegram he had received, and indeed everything which could make a consecutive tale.

Only one trifling detail did Mr. Smith see fit to omit, which was his own complicity, his knowledge of his fellow-prisoner's character and the whole story of the hunting for that treasure which had led him to so lamentable a pass. By his account all he knew was that the spoon had been offered him for sale, that he had come south to buy it (and naturally a great connoisseur kept such things secret)—the Juge d'Instruction was very sympathetic at this point—that while he was negotiating for the purchase, the lady (as he supposed her to be) had led him that dance with which all the world was now acquainted.

As for the description given of him by the evidence of Jean Jacques Bertot, it had already broken down.

To say that Bertot was annoyed when he heard this deposition would be most faintly to portray his Gallic rage. He shook his fist. He foamed. He very openly threatened upon leaving jail (to which he immediately condemned himself by implication) to seek out the man Smit' and strangle him with his hands. He only regretted that the man Smit' being so aged might die

before he had the satisfaction of accomplishing his desires.

All of which outburst did but the more convince the Juge d'Instruction that he had in Smith a genuine article.

It did not take long to confirm that conviction. A perfect hail of telegrams began to fall upon Tarascon, its Sub-Prefect, its Chief of Police, its station-master, its hotel-keepers, and the Juge d'Instruction himself. One cannot arrest millionaires with impunity. In well-governed countries they are never arrested at all, and even in a wild democracy to arrest them is Mug's game.

Within a few hours the Prefect himself had come at post-haste in a gorgeous motor and was rating all his underlings like a parcel of school-boys.

In Paris, both Embassies had moved, the English and the American.

The Minister of Justice, who had himself some experience of prison life in early youth and could sympathise with Mr. Smith, sent urgent and immediate instructions almost blasphemous in their violence.

The Minister of the Interior (a Jewish speculator from Tunis) was in such terror when he heard that Smith had been arrested—Smith who commanded the nitrate group!—that he was

physically and violently sick. His subordinate sent further telegrams, and pretty stiff they were.

The Under-Secretary, whose business it was to concern himself with the Secret Police, made a perfect whirlpool of changes and dismissals in the service; and altogether within that twenty-four hours enough humble lives and petty careers were broken to have satisfied the vengeance of a god.

Anyhow, Pennybunt and Smith were free; and the old financier, a man not remarkable for the finer emotions, contracted a surprising sense of gratitude towards his two deliverers.

This gratitude showed itself first by a direct offer of a large sum of money which Pennybunt had the sense to refuse, but which the little doctor had the sense to accept.

It showed itself next by handsome tips on an enormous scale to the people at the hotel, to the station-master, and to the one policeman who, being more corrupt than his fellows, and knowing something of the world, had smelt out the evidences of wealth, and had allowed him a few minor advantages during the long journey to Tarascon.

It showed itself especially in a devotion to Pennybunt himself, for the old man imagined in some muddled way that Pongo had come

all that way in person to see to his release—nor was Pongo careful to undeceive him.

One thing only troubled Mr. Smith: it was the *spoon*.

“Do you think,” he said to Pongo nervously, and in a low tone, “that if I were to make it clear that it would be . . . worth their while? . . . eh?” They were seated in the hotel waiting for the Paris express.

“I don’t know,” shouted Pongo nervously. He didn’t want to be mixed up with such affairs.

“Does the manager of the hotel speak English?” said Mr. Smith.

“Perhaps—I don’t know,” said Pennybunt, still nervous.

Old Smith disappeared. Doubtless he had sought the manager, and at any rate he came back in a much more peaceful mood; and Pennybunt was a little concerned to see the manager going off across the street towards the Palace of Justice. In a few minutes he returned, and Mr. Smith went out again to interview him and came back radiant. Then they all went off to the station.

The little doctor came to see them off; two or three of the wretched minor officials, still fearing the loss of their incomes, came to tender tearful apologies on the platform; the station-

master reserved a suite upon the *wagons-lits*, and stood with his head bared, bowing and emphasising his concern until the express pulled out.

Then, as the train gathered speed up the Rhône Valley, Pongo watched his opportunity to introduce the great subject of the loan.

He must be careful or he would ruin all.

But the old man seemed so gay and so good-humoured that he wondered at his own hesitation, until, when they had proceeded perhaps half an hour, G. Quinlan Smith looking carefully round him in every direction, and even peering between the curtains of the suite which cut it off from the main part of the carriage, to make sure of their privacy, drew from his pocket a little parcel, opened it, and there lay before Pongo's very eyes the famous English Georgian Silver Rat-tailed *Spoon*, which after doing so much evil had now changed its mind and desired to do good instead.

"*This spoon,*" read Pongo, "*was used by the late Earl of Beaconsfield to stir his cup on the occasion of his graciously accepting tea on his visit to Les Charmettes, then the property of Jeremiah Boulger, Esq., J.P.*"

There was the inscription, and apparently an influence still remained strong upon the Rat-tailed Spoon.

The financier winked, and as he winked he poked his bony finger into Pongo's side. He wrapped his treasure up again most carefully, slipped it into an inner pocket which buttoned with two buttons, and which no doubt he would like to have padlocked as well. He heaved a senile sigh of complete contentment.

Pennybunt's moment had come. He did it cleverly and carefully, talking as though after all it was an important subject and might as well be mentioned now that they had leisure in the train, for when they got to London each of them would be very fully occupied.

The old man nodded gently, suggesting a change of detail here and there; the one was free to bellow in the privacy of the suite, the other therefore could hear—and before they had reached Lyons the loan was safe.

In Paris at the office of Smith, Fischer and Co., in the big new building in the Rue du Quatre Septembre, the business was concluded, and the reader should be told how genuinely glad was Pongo that the honour of his country had been saved, for like all politicians poor Pongo took refuge from the vileness of his trade in a very real patriotism.

CHAPTER XVI

In the train : Have you your ticket ? [*Avay voo voter beeyay.*]

Yes : I have my ticket. [*Wee, zhay mong beeyay.*]

Have you enough money ? [*Avay vooz assay dahrjong.*]

No : I have not enough money. [*Nong zher nay pahs assay dahrjong.*]

May I lend you some ? [*Poueezh vous ong praytay.*]

Yes : certainly ! [*Wee, sairtainmong.*]

Phrase Book for French Travel.

It is a lovely and an honourable thing to die for one's country.

To raise a loan for it, even, is something not to be despised ; and Pongo was very happy indeed when, that evening in Paris, he knew that he had pulled it off.

He bought the English papers on the Boulevard, and he read them with ironic satisfaction. The meeting of Parliament after the recess had been postponed. He could tell almost before he opened those papers what each would say.

The *Moon* pointed out the necessity for such

trivial changes, congratulated the Prime Minister on a well-earned holiday, and understood that Pongo himself had greatly benefited by his short sojourn upon the Coast of Azure, where a vigorous game of golf every day (they published a snapshot and an interview) had restored his pristine vigour. The *Moon* was sure that things of this kind were above party, and begged Pongo to accept its hearty congratulation upon his recovery, in spite of the political differences between them. Now Pongo, remembering how he had sternly stood out against letting the proprietor of the *Moon* pay for his baronetcy by instalments, was gladdened in heart as he read the words.

The *Capon* was in a different mood, for its proprietorship was in very different hands. Indeed, the proprietor of the *Capon* was not related in any way to the proprietor of the *Moon*, and the only link between them was the marriage of the sister of one man to the nephew of the other man's oldest friend. So the *Capon* reprimanded the Prime Minister for extending as he had the Whitsuntide recess; it sternly insisted that the business of the nation could not be made to dance attendance upon the convenience of politicians, however highly placed; and it warned Pongo that though his party (to which the *Capon* offered loyal and unswerving

service) would follow their leader ungrudgingly, the time had come to strike a blow at the infamous administration under which England had now suffered for so many months. They fully admitted Pongo's private necessity for a holiday ; but they asked whether some able lieutenant such as Hawkins or Jenks might not have filled the gap ? Time was pressing, and public opinion would not wait.

All that sort of thing was the fringe and the frills. Pongo turned with much more anxiety to the City columns of the two papers, and there he found less consolation. *There*, there was a beautiful unanimity ! The one half-heartedly criticised, the other whole-heartedly supported the ear-marking of the Indian Loan for relief works ; good, practical, common-sense relief works : reproductive relief works ; relief works supported by all the sound business sense of the country, and what was more, supported by men who, however one might differ from them as Socialists, were tried and able administrators in municipal and even in national affairs ; men of detail : practical administrators, &c.

It was clear that the loan was to be taken for granted by the Humane Public as ear-marked for the relief works and that the Peabody Yid was at it. There was no room for delay ; Pongo must get home at once !

He tore the aged Smith from the delights of that foreign capital, and on the Friday morning of Whitsun week, after a night journey to which no one should have subjected the shrivelled millionaire on the top of so many other ordeals, the Leader of the Opposition and the American financier reached London as men reach harbour out of heavy storms at sea.

Old Mr. Smith went to Mary's house to sleep out the morning. Pongo went to his club and found there just such letters as he had expected. Parliament was to meet upon the Monday, and Dolly particularly insisted upon this : that Pongo should come down to Habber-ton at once. Mary Smith was going to insist on her uncle ; there would be the usual party. Dolly himself would be there, and on the Sunday all the last things could be arranged.

* * *

How great it is to come in from the Atlantic waves, grey and flaked with the storms of April, and to see green grass upon the lawns of the Narrows !

How great a thing it is to come back northward over homing seas from those arid African lands, and after the tropics, after the roar of the south-west wind, hungry for home, to see the bright white Needles with the sun full upon

them, and to pass into Southampton Water, and to love the English trees !

And how great a thing it was for Pongo to end up joyously (after such days !) in cosy but historic Habberton, and to know that all was at rest and that the difficult game was over.

That Saturday evening Habberton dined with a sober festivity, and Mary Smith said to Dolly upon her right :

“ The Peabody Yid wanted to come ! ”

“ Is he coming ? ” said Dolly anxiously.

“ I couldn't refuse him,” said Mary, “ but something turned up. He said that Peggy was really keen upon his asking Moss and one or two others of the Straights to dinner. She's stayed in town for that. The Straights pretend that they don't go out of town for week-ends.”

“ Oh ! ” said Dolly nervously.

“ Don't bother,” answered Mary in a low tone, “ it's all settled, thank God ! ”

But Dolly knew the world, and he knew the Duke of Battersea most damnably well : better now than ever he had dreamt a short month ago that he could know the very innards of such a person as the Duke of Battersea ! He was not at his ease.

Dolly was not yet at his ease, and after dinner Mary Smith tried to make him talk, and failed.

They were in the billiard-room, Pongo was walking round the table, and Victoria Mosel was his partner. She did all manner of amusing things; she chalked the end of Pongo's nose; she sprawled full length over the green cloth; she caught the Leader of the Opposition a side-whack with her cue; never had she been fuller of subtle sprightliness. And Mary Smith, trying to make Dolly talk in a dark corner, asked him if he had not wondered whether those two should not marry?

Dolly was occupied with other things. He answered with indifference, "Oh yes!" He was careless (perfidious friend!) to the future that might open for Pongo should her dreadful scheme be accomplished.

"Dolly," said Mary, in a tone still lower than that which she had been using, "you are worried about something."

"I should think I was," said Dolly.

"What is it?" said Mary with a caress.

"Oh, it's the whole boiling," said Dolly wearily; "old Battersea and my fool of a wife, and the Straights. . . . It makes me sick on the floor," he added savagely, as though for a moment annoyance had snatched him from his elderly fatigue. "I'd like to chuck the whole thing!"

"You said that twenty-five years ago, Dolly," remembered Mary, murmuring, "just after

the Brixton election. You said you were going to chuck it then! But you didn't, Dolly. . . ."

"No," said Dolly gently, and deeply affected as well. "You told me not to."

"Well, I'm always right," said Mary; she moved as though she were going to get up to speak to another group. Dolly put his hand upon her arm quickly.

"Mary," he said in real distress, "what would you do?"

"Do about what?" said Mary, looking at him with open eyes in that dark corner. . . . She looked young in the darkness.

"Oh, you know!" said Dolly.

"No, I don't," said Mary stolidly.

"Well, I mean," said Dolly fidgeting, "here I am, and you haven't even got a telephone in the beastly place! How am I to know what Peggy and that old swine in London are arranging with the Straights for to-morrow?"

"Really, I can't tell," answered Mary with dignity. "You ought to know your wife better than I do. What d'you mean?"

"Oh, Mary," said Dolly appealing, "do *radise* and don't be silly! The Straights'll bolt to-morrow."

"Of course!" said Mary composedly. "Everybody knows that: even the *Habberton News*

knows that!" And she laughed. "I asked the little editor here to dinner, when I was trying to get Niam's young man, whatever his name is, in for Habberton during the last election. . . . The little editor! He was a barber once. It was killingly funny—I must tell you about it."

"Do listen, Mary," said Dolly irritably, "and don't go off at a tangent about Niam and her young man and barbers and the *Habberton News*. . . . It isn't the Straights that matter—it's Pongo's people."

"The Opposition. Oh, *they're* all right," said Mary. "*They* don't want an election."

"Yes," said Dolly, "but all these days the Peabody Yid has been working 'em : and what's worse, working the public. I can't tell you how people seem to have got it into their fat heads that the loan's fixed to the relief works. It'll be dreadfully difficult to break the truth to 'em. Especially the brokers. And then, there's Consols! Have you seen the papers?"

Mary confessed that she had not, and there was a delicious reproach in her tone as she reminded Dolly that he of all people was supposed not to read the papers either.

"Well I *have* read them *this* week," he admitted gloomily, "and the whole damn lot say the Indian Loan is ear-marked. And some of

them hint at Battersea, and one of the brutes calls him by his name."

"That's nothing to do with *you!*" said Mary calmly. "You haven't got to go down to the House of Commons and tell the Sovereign People that you've bamboozled the Yid, and that dear old uncle's got the loan." As she said it her eyes wandered affectionately towards George Quinlan Smith, where he sat smiling inanely and pretending to listen to the babbling of a very pretty little neighbour whose father had no less than three times duplicated the shares of a company, and had now settled down as the Squire of Ashington next door.

"No," said Dolly, "that isn't it. You don't follow. Pongo's all right and his Front Bench. But his party, curse it, I shall have to persuade *them*. They all take the relief works for granted by now. It *is* a business! If I say nothing about it I shall have to get up again later, when the Straights will have heckled; and if I say right off that the loan is free, open, and no relief works tacked on, and the Straights get saying they'll vote against it, Pongo's lot'll stampede."

"Not if he manages them," said Mary in the tone of a woman who is bored by hearing another woman talk about her servants or her children. "If Pongo can't manage his party, what's he there for?"

“That’s just what I’m worrying about, Mary,” said Dolly pathetically. “You might help, Mary, really you might!”

Mary was full of tenderness. “Do you want me to teach you your own business?” she said.

“More or less,” said Dolly.

“Really, Dolly, after all these years! . . . Well, if I were you I wouldn’t have Pongo there at all when you open fire.”

“You wouldn’t?” said Dolly, interested.

“Upon my soul, Dolly, it isn’t the first time or the hundredth that you’ve arranged exits and entries with Pongo!”

“N-no,” said Dolly, “but I’m asking.”

“Well,” said Mary quickly and decisively, “since you’re too knocked out to work on your own, I’ll tell you; it’s simple enough. You get up and slang Pongo. Slang him like the Devil. Will the House let you talk about his legs, or his dear old father—the dentist?”

Dolly shook his head. “No,” he said, “they hate that sort of thing—but I can manage the details.”

“All right,” went on Mary, hurrying to get to the end of it, “there you are slanging Pongo. Don’t talk about anything you oughtn’t to talk of, but slang him hard; only don’t slang him about the loan. Then at your moment in comes Pongo and listens to the end of your speech.

You're glad that the right honourable gentleman is in his place, &c. !—By the way," she interrupted herself anxiously, "can the India Office give you a document ?"

"Well, obviously," said Dolly in the tone of a wondering child. "If they can't they can *make* one, I suppose ?"

"Very well," said Mary, "you read out that document. Quite new—most exciting—very grave—great impression on Pongo ; much wriggling on the Opposition Front Bench ; consternation behind it. See that Pongo's Whip allows one of his Wild Men to get up and make a fool of himself ; the Wild Man shall still insist on relief works and so forth : nothing makes for a policy like the dislike of Wild Men and their crazes. Only," said Mary, here stopping to emphasise the point with her forefinger, "pick your stalwart ! . . . he's got to be a fool !"

"Of course," said Dolly.

"You couldn't coach him ?" said Mary interrogatively. "You don't think it better to get a man who will say what he's been told ?"

"No," said Dolly, looking back reflectively over twenty-five years, "when you want to provoke a reaction it's always better to pick a fool."

"Very well," said Mary. "There's your fool ; the fool has stopped half the stampede

Everybody's muddled; nobody likes to be on the side of the fool. And Dolly," she added a little anxiously, "it must be a *plumb* fool, you know! A real half-wit fool!"

"Oh yes," said Dolly, who knew every name like a roll-call, "Capthorpe."

"Yes," said Mary, well satisfied, "Capthorpe, or the man they call Little Tich. Well, anyhow, there's your fool, and the stampede halted; up gets Pongo (you tell none of your men to get up first); Pongo immensely moved! Grave news! Blames you for not telling the Official Opposition! Unprecedented action; but gravity of circumstances has decided what is his duty. Impossible (and warn Pongo to lower his voice—he's got a fine bass if he'll only put off dinner till after he speaks)—impossible to vote against the Government . . . and all the rest of the show. If *I* were you—or rather if I were Pongo, I'd have a peroration there and then; great dependency; Clive; fought and bled in the Mutiny . . . Wow! wow!" Mary stopped and looked down at the Prime Minister. "You can arrange all that, can't you, dear?" she said.

"Yes," said Dolly, "but, after all, dear, isn't it the ordinary plan?"

"Obviously," said Mary, getting up with a task accomplished, and sailing across the room to relieve her uncle from the flapper, "but"

(looking over her shoulder) "it's all the better for that. . . . People like to be bamboozled in the dear old way!"

* * *

Victoria Mosel had upset her glass across the cloth of the billiard table, and they were all screaming with laughter. Business was over and settled, and there was time for a little pleasure before they must all sleep. But before they slept Dolly had made his appointment with Pongo for the morning.

CHAPTER XVII

“So far from fearing for Unity, we should rejoice to see so many types within the Church.”

THE BISHOP OF SHOREHAM.

It was the custom at Habberton for the household to divide upon Sunday morning after breakfast; some attended Divine Service others went to church as the mood seized them; others held communion with nature, and others again did not but wallowed in their beds. But upon that fateful week-end this simple plan of a complete private judgment was abandoned.

G. Quinlan Smith, though he loved sweet Matins in the country-sides of the dear Old Country, would often study an atlas at home during the hours of their celebration; also, though he was deaf, he hated sermons.

But Mary Smith pressed him on that particular morning for church, and he was roped in. She said that Whitsuntide was a sacred season, and that she particularly wanted him to come.

Victoria Mosel, was Broad; and she was also by nature tired in the morning. The church at Habberton was High, but Mary Smith would

take no denial on that morning, and Vic was marshalled along.

Colonel Thorpe was nervous since his divorce ; but he found himself on the way to church all the same ; and Mrs. Derrick, who said that she was an Atheist, and travelled with three dogs, was told by a servant that she had to go.

As on the ancient hills of England the lonely shepherds mark their sheep and note the places of the lost ones with calm foreseeing eyes, as they also are pleased in heart when the great flock comes in around them upon their way, well tended, and note that all are there, while the dog barks and is careful upon the flanks, and the stragglers flee before his barking—so was the incumbent of Habberton well pleased at the sight of so many rounded up on that holy morning into the one fold. And as the faithful dog has reasons of his own within his own wise head for the service he renders upon the uplifted Downs, so had Mary Smith her reasons for driving before her so many and such various guests into the sacred walls : she wanted the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to be alone.

Meanwhile upon that same walk which they had paced together before ever the troubles of the State had driven them to their various adventures, between those same long lines of Marayahs for which cosy but historic Habberton

is famous, and which had watched the pair a short fortnight before, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, careless of Matins, paced once more.

They were bound together more brotherly than ever by the trials which each had endured during those fourteen days, and which both had conquered so triumphantly.

The shorter, less wealthy, and less parented man was proud of his active and successful service to the State in rescuing old Smith ; he insisted upon his pride and pleasure ; he described in detail his marvellous skill in tracking the prey. The taller man, the man of greater lineage, was grateful in his heart for the service so rendered.

The trouble seemed all solved, and in the beautiful little village church in the valley below (which had been erected in the style of 1857, to the glory of God and in memory of Mary Smith's predecessor in the lordship of cosy but historic Habberton) the gratifier of their hopes, George Quinlan Smith, worshipped his God in peace. It was a calm and lovely morning.

The glorious Caucasian flowers, now fully blossomed, gave a wealth of crimson to the dark avenue ; and their powerful, and slightly offensive, odour was excused by the splendour of their hue.

The tall man and the short paced in communion the full length of that delightful ride.

They had no longer an anxious policy to determine or a problem to solve, but only a simple Parliamentary arrangement to draw up. The papers which had reached Habberton just before they went out made that plan more necessary and more definite than ever. There was no doubt at all that Battersea knew; he knew of Smith's return; he knew the free loan was agreed to; and all he could work was working: the Press to a man and Peggy to a woman—and with Peggy the Straights. The Straights would now certainly speak and vote against the Government.

One thing would save the loan, but that one thing could easily and certainly save it; and that one thing was the moment and the character of Pongo's intervention in the debate of the morrow.

"I shall have to go up to-day," said Dolly. "I've got to see Peggy, you know."

"It's no good interfering with the Straights!" said Pongo, warning him. "They're settled. I know them."

"No," said Dolly wearily, "I know that, too." He was stooping as he always did, and his white hair was more pathetic than ever, but there was something about him strict and determined. As Pongo paced beside him with half-shut eyes, Dolly assured his colleague that he would, if anything, commend the Straights to

Peggy ; he would tell her how valuable it was to have in the House of Commons a body of men who voted by principle. It leavened the whole. "Peggy will have settled their expenses," he murmured gently. "You were quite right ; old Battersea will have seen to that ; besides they expect a dissolution, small blame to them. . . . What about your Whips ?" he added suddenly.

Pongo said that he had given a sort of vague order—and he'd write to them that night. . . . But the party was in a funny state ; it was much better not to bring pressure . . . it was much better to let the Straights talk and to trust to his own declaration ; there couldn't be a stampede after *that* !

Between them the two men arranged their programme very clearly ; Pongo took it to be Dolly's own. Dolly knew well enough that it was Mary's. Dolly was to get up and slang Pongo—of course. At the end Pongo was to come in. Then the Straights' turn to talk, then a fool of Pongo's lot in the back benches.

"Can you make it Capthorpe ?" said Dolly. Pongo smiled, consulted a little book, and made it Capthorpe.

"Then *you*," said Dolly ; and Pongo saw it perfectly.

"Then me ?" he said.

"Yes—then you," said Dolly.

“Would you like to see my notes?” added Dolly, as they turned at the end of the avenue. He pulled from a loose side-pocket a crumple of untidy note-paper.

Pongo took the notes in silence and glanced at them. “I wouldn’t say *that*,” he frowned, marking two lines with his little pencil.

“Say what?” said Dolly, peering down, and stopping in his gait to peer.

“*That*,” said Pongo, “that about the bull-fighting; that sentence, ‘Without the least desire to offend the right honourable gentleman or his colleagues, &c.’”

“Oh,” said Dolly, “of course I know that the deputation thought you more sympathetic than they thought me. It’s always like that when one’s in office. One has to be careful.”

“Yes,” said Pongo, “but it isn’t only that. You see, while I was abroad I *saw* a *real* bull-fight.”

“Did you now?” said Dolly, intensely interested. He was a man of keen intellectual curiosity, and he was always willing to leave the weary business of politics to talk of more entertaining things.

“Yes,” replied Pongo sharply, bringing him back to his bearings, “I did. But that’s not the point. I wrote and told people about it, and said how shocked I was. And I shall have to

bring it all in later when the Foreign Office vote comes up. I don't want my pitch queered by a side-point on the Indian Loan, which has nothing to do with it."

"Of course not," said Dolly sympathetically; and he scratched out the passage with some regret; he had thought it neat. "A bull-fight's very exciting, isn't it?" he added.

"Y-es," answered Pongo, lying freely, "it's a little *too* exciting; it's not the kind of thing one likes to see, really. And I wouldn't have *done* it except that I thought it a sort of duty, you know."

His half-shut eyes shot a glance swiftly at the Prime Minister, but there was nothing beyond interest on Dolly's face; there was no shade of doubt; there was not even the vestige of a smile; there was nothing at all but curiosity.

"It *is* a brutal sort of thing," said Dolly solemnly.

He said it with real conviction; he hated cruelty, and it was due to his action more than to that of any other one man that such judicial torture as still survived in our dependencies was now conducted in private, and within the walls of the prison.

"It disgusts one," said Pongo, shuddering manfully. . . . "The blood and all that. . . . And the poor devils of horses! The men are

brave enough, I s'pose . . . but it's very brutal ! It's the women put one off most ; they get drunk with blood. Oh, it's damnable !" said Pongo, warming to his traveller's tale. Always excepting the pressing of trousers under mattresses, bull-fighting was now the only thing which he really knew more about than his companion. He had *seen* a bull-fight, and he was proud of it. He had a mind to follow up that vein. "Of course," he went on, "the poor beast has a chance and it's magnificent to see him fighting ; but he's nearly always done for . . . it's a regular science, and it's not really dangerous for the men. That's what repels one so much."

"Yes," said Dolly, and now that Pongo had strayed from the main subject Dolly took his revenge for that recent snub, and brought Pongo to *his* bearings in his turn :

"Yes, but we've got to settle about to-morrow."

"Well, we have more or less," said Pongo, annoyed to have his epic of gore cut short. "I'm not to come in till you've nearly done speaking. Can you time it ?"

"Surely," said Dolly gravely, "only you'd better make it later than earlier. If you came in too early it'd spoil it."

"I can always be waiting in my room," said Pongo.

“ Yes, but I mightn’t be able to send,” said Dolly. “ You must be near the door not later than five, anyhow; and when I say you are ‘morally guilty of assassination,’ come in. ‘Assassination’s’ your word.”

“ All right,” said Pongo.

There was nothing more to be settled. It was a simple scenario. Prime Minister slanging Pongo till a quarter to five. Cue: “Morally guilty of assassination.” Enter Pongo. Dolly reads out document supplied by the India Office. Sensation. Straights declare for relief works all the same and challenge Government. Pongo’s back benches cheer in parts. Capthorpe, half-wit, is put up to speak. Pongo’s back benches worried; hate being with a half-wit. Then Pongo rises; impressive; converted by document; fateful moment; national question, above party, &c. Peroration. Clive. Fought and bled. Sits down. After such a speech no division, or, if division, only Straights and Wild Men in Opposition lobby. Loan saved. Smith floats it. Battersea crumpled up. No relief works. Selah! (as they say in the Lodge).

The only good afternoon train of that Sunday bore the Prime Minister up to town. Pennybunt stayed at Habberton for the night. He felt a little out of his element there without Dolly, but he wanted rest. He wrote to Ludlow, his Whip,

but he wrote cautiously : no pressure was to be put upon the party ; it wasn't a question of voting one way or another, he wanted to avoid a division. He would explain when he came to the House. He would turn up before five. Dolly would speak first, of course, and he was to come in before Dolly had done speaking. It was easier to say these things by word of mouth. . . . Anyhow, even if there was a division, what he was going to say would prevent anybody but the Straights and a few Wild Men voting against the Government.

As he finished the letter he said to himself (and he was almost tempted to write it down in his note) ; " Thank God we've got rid of the Irish ! "

So passed that Sunday night. By noon of the next day Dolly was preparing, up in his room in London, for the critical moment. He rarely wrote a speech, but *that* speech he *had* written, and he was working it out with Eddie, carefully and conscientiously ; and he was seeing (in the intervals of his work) that the Press was properly worked for the results of its delivery. There is always a little leakage in such things ; certain securities drooped in sympathy with Hindoos in the City during those hours.

Nor was the Duke of Battersea idle. He had got hold of the whole thing by now, and his spleen

was abroad. He also sat with his secretary alone all that morning ; he was not beaten yet, but he could see no opening by which defeat might be avoided. He would take a revenge later on, but revenge isn't money. Revenge isn't the handling of an Indian Loan.

Peggy, alarmed at the gloom of the household, and told a little nervously by the Duchess that the dear old man was worried, had answered sharply in German that she couldn't understand the way she was treated. She flounced off and lunched with her husband alone, to show how strongly she felt the Duke's treatment of her, and after luncheon she went off to encourage Mr. Moss, whom she was a little disappointed to find needed no encouragement from her ; the Duke had personally guaranteed the expenses of an election. The Straights had their plan and their policy quite clear ; they would speak and vote against the Government—and Peggy, having done what she wanted and yet done nothing, felt spiteful and lonely. She sulked. She wouldn't ask for a seat in the Gallery. Things seemed to have got beyond her ; she wondered why there was so much secrecy about so plain a matter ; and she spent the afternoon with a dressmaker, to whom she gave great pain for several hours.

* * *

When there is a doubt with regard to the issue of a great Parliamentary day, the best thing an editor can do is to consult the Whips ; and since every journal must depend more or less upon one source of information, it is a great saving when all the newspapers go to one source of information.

The agency by which the London papers were supplied their political news in 1925 was a most beautiful example of efficient and economic administration. Its capital was not large, but its methods were too perfect to admit of competition. The Duke of Battersea, himself perhaps the best organiser of the age, had laid down its general lines ; and through his influence (he was not a Director) the correspondents of this admirable office could obtain with ease and celerity whatever it was thought proper for the public to know.

Now upon that Monday, the Monday week of Whitsun, 1925, there were things which should have been known by, but were mysteriously hidden from, not only the vulgar but the great.

It was possible that the Duke of Battersea himself would not disdain to discover what orders had been given to the Great Parties as to that evening's vote, and it was possible that a humble interviewer at two guineas a column would be less suspect than any one more exalted.

On which account a nervous and ill-fed youth, ungloved, in a dirty hat, and clothed in a threadbare coat, turned up a little after eleven on that important morning at the flat wherein reposed, and had just risen from breakfast, the Chief Whip.

The Chief Whip's name was Ludlow. He was a bachelor, not rich but of good family ; a very jolly fellow, with an enormous head quite bald, a huge brown beard, a hearty laugh and the simplest manner in the world. It was characteristic of his kindly heart that he housed his young spendthrift brother (a clean-shaven, tousle-headed chap, something of a rake but with all the family geniality). Ludlow not only housed him, he made him an allowance ; and not content with that, he had taken the trouble to have him appointed Chief Whip to the Opposition, an office which did not carry with it, indeed, an immediate salary, but gave good promise of the same. The younger brother could have borrowed on the expectation had he chosen ; but he was too careless or too honourable.

The young man asked the servant timidly whether he could see Mr. Ludlow.

" Which Mr. Ludlow ? " said the servant, suspicious of such a caller at such an early hour.

" Mr. Ludlow, the Whip," said the young man nervously.

The servant, like too many of that class, while fully recognising the importance of the household, was a little vague as to its political functions. Young Ludlow and the Opposition Whip, having received that morning his chief's letter, made certain as he heard the conversation at the door that it was a message for him. He gave a cheerful hulloo (it was his trade to be cheerful), linked arms very familiarly with the new-comer, and brought him inside.

The interviewer stammered a little and was abashed. With the courtesy of the great Young Ludlow plumped him down on a nicely cushioned seat in the hall, and begged him to open fire.

‘ Only,’ he said, wagging his tousled hair, ‘ I warn you ! I can't tell you anythin' more than what you know already . . . that is, if you're the chap from the *Moon* ? ’ he added interrogatively.

The interviewer, more nervous than ever, said he wasn't from the *Moon*, he was from the agency. He pulled out his little book and his pencil and waited for developments.

‘ Well,’ said Young Ludlow, standing up before him as breezy as the stage sailor on the quarter-deck at Drury Lane, ‘ I can't tell you more than a fellah knows. What ? We none of us know more than you do, what ? ’

“No, sir, of course not,” murmured the terrified interviewer.

“Well, there you are,” said Young Ludlow, winding things up rapidly. “*I’m* all agreeable. There aren’t any secrets. But it’s a ticklish moment, eh? Nothin’ really for the evenin’ papers, and you’ll know as much as we do by the morning ones. I’m no use, really. Wish I was!”

“But I thought,” queried the poor interviewer, screwing up his courage, “I thought, Mr. Ludlow, that you could give me some idea of the *order* of the proceedings, at least—of course, you can’t tell me how any one’s going to vote,” he added, smiling faintly, “but the *order*? You see, we thought, as Chief Government Whip——”

“Oh!” said Young Ludlow with immense gusto, seeing that the boredom was to be lifted from his shoulders. “Chief *Government* Whip! That’s my brother! Right-o, don’t move!” And with a bound he was in the little room where his brother, Big Ludlow, was still finishing breakfast. “It’s you they want, Kite,” he said.

“Who?” said the good-humoured, bald and brown-bearded fellow.

“Oh, a newspaper man,” said Young Ludlow, rapidly escaping into the next room.

“Damn!” said Big Ludlow; but he went out and greeted the newspaper man, who half rose in courtesy and then sat down again, to show his familiarity with the habits of the great. Big Ludlow surveyed him expansively, standing before him just as his brother had done, and said:

“Well, you know, I’m sorry to disappoint you, but we’re no wiser than you, eh, what? Tell you anything I could, ’m sure. What? But there you are, you know! There’s some things no fellah knows! Always do anything we can for the *Capon*. . . .” The interviewer murmured that he was not from the *Capon* but from the agency, and he experienced that curious sensation which many psychologists have noted when the mind is certain of having passed at some former time, perhaps in a former life, through some experience identical with the present.

“We thought at least, Mr. Ludlow,” said the poor fellow nervously, getting up to go, “that the order of speeches . . .”

“Oh, the *order*,” said the jolly, bearded man with a jolly laugh. “The *order*! Oh well, the *order* of speaking—that depends on the Chair, you know!” He looked gloomily ignorant and shook his head. “Prime Minister’ll make a statement, of course, but we can’t say *when*. Can’t

say who'll catch the Speaker's eye! That's just luck! Ain't it? What? That depends on the Chair." And he wagged his bald head as men do when they leave everything upon the knees of the gods.

"Thank you, Mr. Ludlow," said the interviewer, "it was very good of you to have seen me."

"Not at all," said the genial Kite in his happiest tones, "not at all. Anything I can do—always here when you want me!"

He showed the little man out himself, and then went back to his unfinished breakfast.

"What's a man like that get?" he asked of his younger brother, who sauntered in.

"I dunno," said Young Ludlow, lighting his pipe.

"Well, you *ought* to," said Kite decisively. "I got you on to the *Capon* for six months."

"They didn't give *me* anything," said Young Ludlow, "what?" The brothers went off each to his letters—and thus was the Information of the British Press upon the designs of the Party Leaders conducted and concluded.

CHAPTER XVIII

“It fell suddenly—it was a regular Bolt from the Bull!”

Extract from the correspondence of Lady Bramber.

THE station for Habberton is the little station of Winckley. It had been built for the convenience of Lord Holly in 1854 and was, in his time, well served. After his death the commerce of Habberton hardly justified its frequent use, and expresses never stopped there nor even ordinary trains save three a day.

By a happy coincidence, since Mary Smith had bought the place, the time-tables had proved more generous, and it was a great relief to her, with the sort of week-ends she delighted in, to know that her guests could reach town almost as quickly as though she had lived in one of the great provincial towns. So courteous was the directorship that she would often be permitted to stop a train by signal, even though it were not scheduled ; and it was a matter of great regret to her when testy passengers, unused to the elastic social code of England, cursed and swore at such delays or even wrote to the papers

concerning them—though it is true that such letters, though often received by our sterling Press, were but very rarely printed.

Upon Monday mornings the express from Plymouth did regularly halt at Winckley for a few moments, and landed its passengers in town a little after two o'clock, in ample time for Parliament. It was the express with which Mary Smith's political guests, and Dolly in particular, were most familiar. It was the express which Pongo designed to take upon the critical day.

He would walk ; the morning tempted and invited him ; he wanted her to take his luggage up later when she came herself in the evening. She made him promise to call at her house in town the next day ; she was full of her plans about Victoria Mosel, and Pongo, delighted with so much ease of arrangement, left cosy but historic Habberton by the kitchen garden to take the short cut through Habberton Wood and Longcombe to Winckley.

He was feeling almost young, so happy was the morning. There was a quiet mist over the tords but a sunlight piercing through, and he went briskly across the broad pastures that fell gently from the house and led towards the distant fringe of trees. He had before him three-quarters of a mile of grass, separated

here and there by palings or an open iron fence.

Well did Pongo know the point at that fringe of trees for which he should aim, and where he would pick up the path through Habberton Wood! He had last walked it four months before with Victoria, the time she had stuck in the narrow stile, and he had had to get her foot out by taking her boot off and then to carry her home pick-a-back because her ankle hurt. How well he remembered that morning! It was the morning he had gone up to take part in the Foreign Office debate when the Toreadors had first shown their real power, and he had made that bad blunder of his which his subsequent sympathy had so amply repaid.

The Leader of the Opposition felt blythe; he would have sung a song had he known in what manner this act is properly performed. As it was, he whistled, and as he whistled, he perceived in the next field an animal with which one might have thought the life of our English country-sides would have made him familiar. It was a cow. Or was it a cow? Perhaps it was a bullock . . . maybe a beeve, or a heifer. He wondered curiously within himself how he came to be so ignorant. His thoughts recurred to the first election he had ever fought (and lost) when he had been asked to distinguish between

three corns—of barley, of wheat, and of oats respectively—at a village meeting, and failing to distinguish between them had been hooted, yea, and stoned.

Then his mind reverted to the Beast in his path.

He approached the iron fence between them, and considered how true it was that a busy man like himself might have a hundred occupations but could only properly attend to one! He had read that somewhere in a book. He thought of his little farm, and of how fond he was of it: and yet how little he knew of rural things! For instance . . . this animal in front of him . . .

Pongo was come to the iron fence. He had stopped whistling in the effort of climbing it, and as he did so he looked furtively at the beeve—to give it its generic name. A new word occurred to him: perhaps it was an ox.

He was down upon the same side of the fence: he was walking resolutely across the pasture, whistling again louder than ever, swinging his stick, and gazing fixedly before him. Long years before, in his humble Dental home, he remembered his mother telling him never to be afraid of cows.

The Beast had lifted its head and was looking at him with a stupid ferocity. It was, perhaps,

the length of a cricket pitch away. It stood upon his flank. . . . Pongo remembered that two methods were advisable in the domination of the animal world : the one was nonchalance, the other a steady gaze. Each, he remembered uncomfortably, had been recommended him for sea-sickness. He confusedly recollected that—at sea—nonchalance had paid best (a bad best), and as he recollected this he cocked one eye up towards the tender sky, felt in his pockets for his keys, scratched his nose, and in other ways distracted his mind, taking great care the while not to press his pace nor to show any sign of interest in any being that might haunt his neighbourhood.

Yet he could not forbear one sharp sidelong glance as he passed abeam, and there he did perceive that the Enemy had lowered his head ; the left hoof was pawing impatiently, the tail had not yet risen, but two splendid horns were menacing. Pongo withdrew his glance and considered what all brave men consider in the crises of their fate.

Between him and the wood was a double line of wire, such a thing as one can bend and stride through easily, though a little too high for a short-legged man of middle age to negotiate by straddling over. It was, perhaps, a hundred yards away, and Pongo, with far too much sense

to run, was none the less approaching it with remarkable celerity, when a terrific bellow of a suddenness most unsportsmanlike at such a moment burst from the Bull (for such, alas, he was!) whose domain the statesman had rashly invaded.

Then it was that Mr. Pennybunt, Leader of the Official Opposition, wholly forgetting all maxims, whether of prudence or of art, whether rational or empyric, bolted like a hare—or rather, if the proportion of his limbs be considered, like an ape or an aquatic bird!

Heavens, how he ran! Experts in these matters have put it upon record that the hundred yards cannot be covered in much less than ten seconds, Mr. Pennybunt, though indifferent to records, supported their conclusion. Speed, and the salvation of the body, these wholly occupied his mind: for behind him, now gathered for the charge, hammered and thundered a greater Male than he!

There were thirty yards! There were twenty! There were ten! There were *five*! The little legs were twinkling like a shuttle in a loom, the double line of wire was within a hand-grasp, when the primal gods awoke in Mr. Pennybunt. Instinct dug the spur into his leathern hide; he doubled to the left, and the Bull came bang against the wires! They sang as a harp sings

when some good harper takes two strings and twangs them before he begins his song, when the lords are gathered together in hall and the story of the battle begins.

They twanged, and the uprights shivered, but held firm. Far on the left Pongo, hatless, in an agony of hurry, was wriggling between the wires.

The Bull, more courageous than intelligent, watched him for a moment in red stupidity; his tail occupied the air above him, and blood was in his eyes. Then it dawned upon his crass bovine nature that the insolent intruder was escaping. He crashed after him, took the place where the eminent politician had passed, took it with a shoulder in bias, and with horns and forehead. Down it went. There was blood now on the brute's flank where the iron standards had torn it, and the pain improved his temper not at all.

With a bellow far louder than that which had sounded his charge, he trampled his way out of the entanglement, and ho! the hunt was up!

The sweat of fifty years stood or rather leapt across the deathly face of the agonised man! We are as young as our arterics. Champagne, spirits, late hours, gambling and all the life of the rich had, in him who had entered that

life so late, bred arteries already extremely old. He felt something go wrong within him; he wondered whether it was his heart. . . . He had little time for wonder! The mad beat of hoofs was after him again, in a few seconds he would feel the horns. Not wisdom nor the gods below, nor even an angel, but blind Fate drove him right for the wood; he thought he was making between two trees—posts—a sort of cavern, his eyes were blurred, the dreadful noise was almost at his heels, he had plunged inside something; when a sudden gloom surrounding him woke instinct once again in his heart; he kicked a door to with a vigorous heel, and lay prone in complete darkness, moaning horribly, and wondering whether this were death.

It was about twelve o'clock. The birds were silent in the woods without; all was silent; and Mr. Pennybunt slowly recovering from that dreadful plunge, appreciated three things: first, his stomach was in awful pain, secondly, there were chinks of light here and there coming through wooden walls, thirdly . . . much the most important . . . outside, within a foot of him, but now—oh! now cut off—a Mighty Beast sniffed with curious anger.

He had not long to wait for the meaning of that. There was a shuffling of hoofs, receding for a moment through the grass, then a pause. . . .

A tremendous gallopade, and bang came the Bull, head down, against the frail structure of his refuge. It shook, and Mr. Pennybunt prayed. Then, for perhaps ten minutes, the Bull wandered along the limited line of the defence, complaining; but the Bull is a tenacious beast.

Half an hour passed. Mr. Pennybunt had time to pity himself, and he did so—bitterly.

He was not at an age when such things can be taken lightly. What right had Mary Smith to leave a Bull loose? Why hadn't some one warned him? He knew where he was now, he was in a little shed that had been built for the stags many years ago and was abandoned. He felt in his pocket for a match-box, and found two matches; he struck one and it went out, whereat he did not pray but swore. He struck the other much more gingerly, and while it flared he saw that the door, by heaven's luck, fastened with a heavy catch. It was this that had saved him. The walls were of stout logs; before he could discover anything further, the match went out, and he bethought him how changeable is mortal life, and what a puppet is man in the hands of the strong gods.

Time is not easy to guess in mere darkness. Pongo sat occupied mainly by terror for one hour and at least one more, and heard outside the champing of his foe. Then to terror there

gave place another pain, or perhaps the two pains mixed confusedly. He remembered Parliament!

His train was gone long ago, but he might yet save affairs with a motor; he held his breath and listened; he heard nothing . . . only perhaps a breathing. Very cautiously, gingerly, silently he lifted the heavy catch. He had drawn the door a crack, an inch open, he had taken one glimpse of the landscape without, when he shut the door again, three times as quickly as he had opened it, for the landscape had been obscured by a great Bull's head, larger than sky and field, full of stupid but angry wonderment, and ready, when it had quite understood, to gore.

He sat down to bear the thing as best he might; for two hours more and for three he bore it in the darkness. He could not hear the friendly step of man nor distant human voice, but he still heard, wandering on the confines of his prison, the hoofs of that stupidly tenacious Belua or Horrible Great Brute which desired his death.

He wondered whether there were clouds sailing in the heaven without his prison, and what the busy world of men was doing outside. It seemed a year since he had tasted freedom. . . .

It was late in the afternoon, how late he did not know, but not yet dark, when Pongo suddenly discovered that he was a fool. He only had to shout !

He filled his lungs (not without a sharp spasm lower down) and gave a vigorous yell.

The Bull so challenged let loose a terrific sound unnatural in its enormity, a roar that made even Mr. Pennybunt, who had so long been accustomed to the pure light of reason, think suddenly of Hell. And then (oh, cruelty of dumb beasts !) the diabolic thing outside once more most pitilessly charged ! This time one horn struck the door, and pierced it. Daylight came through, and with daylight a moment of agony for the unfortunate statesman.

But horned cattle hate entanglement. The Bull, puffing and blowing, wriggled out his weapon from the splinters, and stood back, pawing, snuffing, and sullenly contemplating his next point of attack. Nearly half an hour passed before he delivered it, during which time the unfortunate Pongo put his eye most delicately at intervals to the rent the horn had made, and surveyed the world and his besieger. It was growing dark and his last chance of success was dwindling.

The Bull made up his mind for one last attempt ; he drew himself up magnificently—

any one with a soul less base than a politician's would have admired the sight—he lifted up his head to Heaven, where the Father of Bulls resides and helps them in their bovine wars, he squared his splendid shoulders, lowered his front again for duty, and wough! he charged. . . .

* * *

Just as the end of all things had thus come to the Leader of the Opposition, Heaven, which rules all well, and has a peculiar eye for England, would not allow so mighty a thing as the parliamentary system to perish.

It was the hour when agricultural men seek their homes from labour upon the fruitful earth, and when the cattle are driven homeward toward their lazy byres, and Hesperus, the good star, sends down upon all the drowsy world her influence of home.

The bull-reeve and his attendants sought in the field for the prize bull; but all in vain. They saw the trampled sward, they came to the broken wires. They reached the shed just as their charge charged for the last time; they mastered him, and as they wondered what had provoked their darling, seeking within the darkness of the hut, they collared the unhappy Pongo.

They dragged him out from where he cowered,

and brought him forth pell-mell by the scruff and the middle under the light of their lanterns. They were angry and blown, and the bull-reeve was none the pleasanter for seeing flakes of blood upon his treasure's flank. He was a horrid great fellow like a boar; he got a grip of the wretched Pongo and shook him as though to shake damages out of him for what had happened.

“Ar, bor, ar, mubbe so be zar ye be arter zummat?” he said, sketching out a first criticism of what had happened. A henchman answered “Ar!” and accompanied it with a kick which caught Pongo on a bone and hurt him abominably. A second henchman clenched it by asking, “Wahrn ee be un or no? Ar?”

Without giving Pongo time to answer so searching a question the master shook his captive again, shouting “Whoinzpaäk?” and at that word a loud babel arose.

“Gentlemen,” said Pongo, “gentlemen!” His vigour was clean driven out of him by such an experience, but he wrenched himself free and stood panting and rubbing himself by the wall of the hut.

His collar had been wrenched off him, half the buttons of his waistcoat were ripped off, his shirt was torn, his tie was slewed round and it fluttered; his boots were cakes of mud,

gathered in some soft place where he had splashed through mire as he fled from the Fury of the Field. He gasped and implored their mercy. Now that they could turn their flickering lanthorns on to him they noted for the first time the stuff of his clothes, and a great fear fell upon them, even upon the bull-reeve himself, lest they, mere serfs, had tampered with one of their lords.

Here surely, for all his dirt and misery, was not one of the gang who had sworn to steal the Bull before Fair Day! There was some mistake!

“Meanozortoarm, zir!” said the bull-reeve sullenly, looking his victim up and down, and wondering what to do next.

“I don’t know what you *meant*,” said Pongo, “but you hurt damnably.”

Far off down the road where his two captors were leading him, the Bull most nobly bellowed, and Pongo shuddered as he heard. That sound reminded the bull-reeve of his grievance.

“Ar,” he said again, “whartcallyud t’quarl wit’ Bull?”

“I didn’t want to quarrel with the Bull, you fool,” said Pongo, his Cornish temper deeply moved.

“Ooübeeacarlinoafül?” said the bull-reeve angrily, beginning the whole thing over again.

“Gentlemen,” implored Pongo, “gentlemen. . . .” Then he suddenly bethought him of the Perfect Cure for human ills. He pulled out a five-pound note.

“I don’t know where I am,” he said, “and it’s dark. I must get to Habberton. I must! At once! Now you be good fellows and take me to Habberton!”

The rustics eyed him suspiciously. At last he made out more or less clearly that they would take him and deliver him. They were running no risks. He went by unfamiliar ways—urging them all the while to haste—until he saw the big house making a dark patch against the sky. They got him round to the door by the stables and handed him over to the butler. Pongo felt vicious, and when the butler came out, full of concern and deference, he repocketed his five-pound note, which hitherto he had held firmly grasped in his right hand as he trudged, using it towards his captors as the carrot is used towards the donkey, dangled before it in promise and bribe for good service.

The bull-reeve was sincerely disappointed, and so were all his men. They desired to interrogate the butler, but by him they were severely snubbed; and by a footman who was standing by very gravely warned. They went off again through the darkness, under a vague

impression that they had troubled some one who had to do with the King of England, and they decided in their muddy minds as they went to inspect the wounded steer, that misfortunes never come alone.

Upstairs in his room at Habberton, in what had been his room at Habberton till that morning, Pongo was in a fever . . . could he, oh ! could he be in time to save that vote—more it was too late to do !

He was in rags and thick with mud. He borrowed at top speed every garment he could lay hands on : boots from Henry which were too big for him ; a pair of trousers with braid down the sides from Thomas ; a striped livery waistcoat, yellow and black, from Charles ; a shirt with a turn-down collar from some unknown benefactor in the servants' hall ; a tasteful tie from John. He distributed largess. He was agonised with hurry. There had been an accident . . . he would explain . . . could he have one of the motors ?

The butler was extraordinarily tactful ; every one had gone up to town. Mrs. Smith had gone up in one of the motors. The other one he thought couldn't . . . But there was a train, there was one in twenty minutes.

When did it get into town ?

“ Half-past ten.”

Let him have the thing at once and buzz him down to the station !

Pongo was nearly beside himself as he whirled those few miles through the night. He thanked his stars as he just leapt into the train in time. He watched anxiously all the way up to town by how much the train was late, and what chance he had. He must get in before the fatal chance of a division. He must get in well before it : he must get in in time to speak. He wondered (oh, how much he wondered !) about that stampede of his party. He could read nothing and think of nothing. He did not note the curious glances which his fellow-travellers devoted to the incongruity of his garb, to his braided trousers, and his big boots, his livery-striped yellow and black waistcoat, his noble tie, and the singular fact that he was devoid of a hat.

The train steamed in ten minutes late ; he bolted into a taxi, shouted " House of Commons," and leaning back in the vehicle, began to hope against hope and to count the minutes as they passed.

He was a hundred yards from Big Ben, and that most accurate of clocks marked five minutes to eleven, when with a singular noise not unlike an interrupted snore, the taxi stopped dead at the end of Parliament Street.

The driver was beginning to explain in some

detail the nature of the accident when he was horrified to see his fare, without a thought of payment, dash through his arms and spurt at top speed through Palace Yard towards the door that led to his room in the House of Commons.

His friends had told Pongo more than once that he was like Napoleon. It was a lie. But he acted somewhat as Napoleon would have acted then. He went straight for the goal. Eleven had not struck, Westminster is a palace of surprises, the situation might yet be saved.

He reached his room: it was empty. He tore up from it toward the lobbies, and came to them blown, exhausted, miserable, unkempt, dressed as no great statesman ever yet was dressed since the beginning of time, but even as he ran he heard the fatal shout "Divisio-o-on," sounding down the passages.

CHAPTER XIX

“ Sometimes a strange fit seizes the animals for no apparent reason, and the whole herd will stampede together in a mad gallop over the pampas.”—Gibson’s “ Natural History of South America,” vol. ii. p. 164.

THAT Monday when Dolly got up to town he was very really tired.

His mind might be compared to the body of a man who has been wrestling with one stronger than himself, who has been racked in every way, who now at last stands free, but who has one more effort to make, not against his adversary but to reach his home. Or he was like a man who has swum in against a difficult tide to save himself in a harbour mouth, and, reaching shore almost fainting, still knows that he must walk some yards to human safety.

The business of the House of Commons, which he had enjoyed more than most of his kind (which so many of his kind cannot bear), he looked forward to with fatigue. But after all it was a contented fatigue ; it was a fatigue beyond which there would be repose.

One thought still troubled him : the necessity

of meeting the ill-judged opposition of a number of men.

He could have wished that the day before him was going to be one of those days normal to political life, in which a sham battle is fought with great noise and circumstance, but during which no one in any part of the House brings in the offensive note of sincerity. To-day (he told himself, as he sat in his room looking through some papers before going into the House) there was bound to be a trace of that note ; and he hated it.

The public was as full by this time of the Relief Works as of the Loan—fuller, indeed. The City took the security of the works for granted, and all the humanitarians were with them now, in the House and out of it.

He had a hard task before him, when he must rise to make his statement and insist that the Government should have a free hand to do what it liked with the money.

He feared the silence and bewilderment of his own side. He feared still more the chances of folly in the Opposition below the gangway.

The Straights would protest, of course, and at once : the Wild Men on the Opposition side might cheer them ; and then there was the arrangement with Pongo to put up Capthorpe, the half-wit. Though every word the half-wit

said in favour of the relief works and against leaving the Government a free hand would alienate more and more of his own side and be a help to Dolly and to the policy of reason, yet to have even to listen to such stuff was nervous work for any one who had gone through what Dolly had just gone through.

He came into the House towards the end of Questions, and just before he took his place he saw Young Ludlow and Big Ludlow talking together. Big Ludlow, for the tenth time, was telling Young Ludlow about the arrangement. Young Ludlow was telling Big Ludlow (for the tenth time also) that he knew all about it. Young Ludlow might be bad at remembering faces, and his brother might be right in telling him that his way of pronouncing names was offensive, but at any rate he flattered himself he could understand a plan.

There was to be Dolly's speech ; Pongo was to come in at the end of it ; then Moss would deliver himself, then the half-wit was to be put up on their side, Young Ludlow's side, to prevent the stampede by the unpopularity of his imbecility. Then Pongo was to get up and agree with Dolly. Young Ludlow had a time-table of it all. He compared notes with Big Ludlow to see that they agreed.

Dolly was down for about an hour, till five ;

Pongo was to come in a little before five ; Dolly was to be at the height of his slanging of Pongo when Pongo came in ; Dolly was to get particularly personal about ten minutes to five, and he, the Opposition Whip, was to take his cue from the worst of the slanging if Pongo should be late, and to go and fetch him. On Pongo's coming in there was to be some cheering from the moderate part of the Opposition. Young Ludlow had asked them especially. Moss was to speak after Dolly ; the moment Moss was down, Capthorpe the half-wit was to get up and speak. He had told Capthorpe—and Capthorpe had been immensely flattered !

That would take them till about half-past six at the latest. Then Pongo was to get on to his very short hind legs and talk of the gravity of the situation, and all his party was to listen in awed silence. Young Ludlow had arranged for the "awed silence," and Big Ludlow, who was a little nervous about it, had been at the pains of asking Worston at dinner, since Worston was the most respected of millionaires on the Opposition side, to start the Awed Silence if he didn't mind. He might cough or blow his nose. It would really please Dolly, Big Ludlow said, and Worston, whose sister had married Dolly's secretary's brother, was much too good a fellow to refuse. . . .

It was essential to get the whole thing over before eight, because of the dinner at Madame de Schahrr's.

Never was any of the thousand party rehearsals more carefully timed.

* * *

As Dolly came into the House he gave one of those glances which negroes and politicians instinctively acquire, glances in which the eye seeks an object sidelong without a corresponding movement of the head. He spotted in the Peers' Gallery, amid a blur of Peers, the aged Duke of Battersea, and in his heart he smiled. The Duke would probably be surprised.

A little before four o'clock Dolly unfolded the joints of his aged, tall, ungainly figure, and began to speak.

The House was very crowded. Every one was waiting for the announcement of the policy upon which the loan depended. Two Indians in the Public Gallery gave an exclamation together and were turned out. There was a complete silence when Dolly began his long, dull, and elaborate survey of the conditions that demanded the assent of the House to the very large experiment of the New Indian Loan. He explained what everybody knew—that this loan, under the new Imperial Council Act, must be ratified by the House of Commons, that the

conditions of India were, &c. &c., that British credit, &c. &c., that our great dependency, &c. &c. He made it as dull as he could, and he was successful ; but no one left the crowded benches ; they were waiting to hear what they had come to hear, and to know the conditions of the loan.

At about half-past four the slanging of Pongo began—and it was magnificent ! Never was a better preparation made by a Prime Minister for a great sacrifice on the part of a Leader of the Official Opposition. He slanged Pongo up hill and down dale, loaded him with the responsibility of the crisis, banged him about the walls and wiped the floor with him with an increasing vigour and at last, crashing out the word “assassination,” halted an imperceptible moment for the villain to enter, L.C.—but no Pongo came !

There was nothing for it but to fill in the time with more slanging—to avoid an anti-climax.

A private member would not have been allowed to go to the lengths which Dolly was permitted. He said things about the Leader of the Opposition which, had that gentleman been present, would have provoked him, in spite of the farce, to uneasy movements. There were protests from the back benches of the Opposition, and in the case of one man who had acquired the

fatal habit of drinking wine at luncheon and who was not always himself in the afternoon, Young Ludlow had to go round and speak to him to prevent an interruption.

Had the right honourable gentleman been there—Dolly wagged his forefinger at the empty place, and Young Ludlow, though his acting was never good in private theatricals, put on with excellent effect the tragic air of discomfiture—had the right honourable gentleman been there, he would have asked him by what abasement of his public conscience, by what cynical abandonment to the shameful intrigues of party, he had permitted the situation in India to reach its last deplorable phase!

On it went and on ; Dolly had only a quarter of an hour more to do it in ; it had to get louder and louder, if Pongo's entrance from the Left Centre was to be properly affective ; and the more Pongo delayed the more did Dolly lay it on—but he dared not begin the statement of his policy nor produce the decisive document till Pongo entered—and Pongo still delayed.

The hour hand of the clock crept farther and farther past the hour of five : even the oldest and the most corrupt were beginning to take an interest in the violent performance. Dolly had lashed himself into a frenzy which, on the stage itself, would have seemed exaggerated.

He kept it going at full pressure for ten minutes more. . . . But he was wobbling . . . and no Pongo !

There is a sickening feeling of suspense which all the world knows who has waited for a travelling companion up to the very starting of the train, and who, scanning the platform, first with anxiety and then with trepidation, finds his plans at the last moment breaking beneath him because that friend has failed. There is an awful moment of despair in the mind of the commander when the critical advent of an expected force far off down the line is watched for in the last stage of a combined movement, and is perceived to have failed.

Something of these emotions did the Prime Minister feel as the place of the Leader opposite him still remained empty, and the combination for some unaccountable reason refused to mature.

He couldn't keep up the slanging. He had nothing more to say. Long practice in the pouring out of words stood him in stead for twenty minutes more ; he filled those twenty minutes vaguely and badly, dwindling off into suggestions and rhetorical questions, until at last, wet and worn out, he all but collapsed at the end of an anti-climax.

The silence behind him was uncomfortable. There was a feeling that somehow or other

nothing was happening, when Dolly in desperation turned to the real business of the afternoon and began mentioning the conditions of the loan.

He dared not interweave it with the slanging of Pongo. A breath, a hint, that Pongo was acting unpatriotically and refusing to give the Government a free hand would have been as good as telling the whole Opposition to vote against the Government.

He dared not say that Pongo would back him up. There are crudities and cynicisms which even the party system does not permit—which its own sense of self-preservation does not permit.

He sweated haltingly through the first dozen sentences and then began what was in effect a totally new speech. And heavens, how it failed! One speech tacked on to the end of another is never a very pretty thing to hear. But that day of all days! The Diplomatic Gallery looked over curiously, and the Argentine Minister, who stood for such important interests and was now the most popular foreigner in London, remarked to a noble German that Dolly was getting ready to retire. The Duke of Battersea dominated the scene with his unmoved, heavy, and largely developed face. He was waiting for the declaration—and the declaration came.

Dolly meant it to be virile and short. But it wasn't. It was no more virile and short than he was. It was what he was, old, thin, jaded and jointed to excess. He smiled unwittingly and apologised (in tone at least) throughout, and once or twice he was snappish against an imaginary enemy. He excused his own independence before he asserted it; he looked round twice uncertainly to his following, and he lost his place more than once when he heard the Opposition, or rather the wilder members of it, interrupt with a cackle. But one way or another he got it out at last—"The Government was determined that the money received and voted in this manner should be free for use in any contingency whatsoever that might arise."

As he said this Dolly put on a firm little look, like an old maid in the provinces insisting on her change. He hit the despatch-box uncertainly with his fist, and unfortunately he did it again much less strongly immediately afterwards. He looked round the House with what was meant to be a sweep, but was only a nervous survey; not a cheer arose from his own benches, and as he saw that dreadful gap opposite where Pongo should have been, his stomach fell within him.

The speech went phut; it concluded in a few half-murmured sentences, a little shriek

about "the untrammelled energies of an Imperial people," and it died away, and Dolly flopped down. . . . He ought to have eaten more at luncheon. He was really unwell.

It was six o'clock—Dolly had been speaking for two hours—when Mr. Moss rose with the calm that always marked him, and the contempt of men which had endeared him to the mass of mankind.

He made a very sensible, very straightforward speech, that went admirably with the glistening oil on his head, and the peculiarly rigid character of his clothing. The sneers of it, for it was full of sneers, were as consonant to his large lips as was the exact modulation of it consonant to the lack of life in his bright almond eyes. He had to announce the policy of those for whom he spoke.

The Prime Minister in the whole of his speech had only devoted one passage to the matter which the House was awaiting, and that passage was disappointing. Unless before the end of the evening some gentleman could give the House a definite assurance on the part of the Government that the Relief Works (loud cheering) were safe—nay, that at least half the money voted was to be allocated to them, he for one—here there were two cries of assent from the Opposition, and the gentleman who drank at luncheon cheered in imitation of a cock—he for one would

oppose the loan and would carry his opposition to a division.

Mr. Moss was not perturbed by the sympathy rising around him. He had a very simple thing to say and he said it. Hitting the fat curled palm of his left hand with the fat shapeless fist of his right in a way that made the best observers certain that he was destined for the Front Bench before many years, the House, said Mr. Moss, with perfect judgment, had waited to hear what proportion of the loan was to be apportioned to the Relief Works which the demands and the necessities of our fellow-subjects cried for most urgently. He and those for whom he spoke had a very plain duty to perform (Mr. Moss looked down at his boots as he said these words, and then hoisted his nose up again); it was a plain question of aye or no. Were they certain of substantial expenditure upon the Relief Works or were they not?

At this lapidary and simple demand, two very young men upon the Opposition side were so moved that they loudly shouted their approval, and then, abashed, were silent. Mr. Moss, still undisturbed, continued. He did not nor did his colleagues desire to embarrass the Government in a very difficult position.

As far as they were concerned, of course, his colleagues and himself (and Professor Cheasely assented in a shrill donnish treble) would have

desired the *whole* of the loan to be devoted to the relief of our suffering fellow-subjects. But Mr. Moss trusted there was nothing unreasonable about him ; he smiled at the House as he said this, and as he smiled his shining skin looked about as fanatical as a bladder of lard. An understanding, a distinct understanding that there was to be a substantial apportionment—he had suggested fifty per shent.—for the purpose which they all had in their hearts, would satisfy his colleagues and himself.

When Mr. Moss had thus concluded he bent his chin down upon his neektie, took his left coat-tail and his right coat-tail in his left hand and his right hand, parted them, and sat down most ungracefully. His surcease was greeted with sporadic but dangerous cheers. They broke out in so many parts of the House that they seemed to give a sort of unanimity to its opinion—but the Opposition were loudest. Dolly's own little cousin, Bill Purvis, Jenny's son, was fool enough to say "Hear, hear!" loudly. He thought he was doing the right thing, and the Front Bench was sick with him. He went down eighteen points, the little ass!

Ten members were on their feet to speak. Dolly looked wearily, with the gaze of a dying man, at the empty place opposite him. He wondered whether Pongo was dead! But no!

Pongo, far off in the West country, huddled himself shivering in a dark place, and trembled to the sniffing of a Bull; a Bull that guarded and hated him and waited for vengeance, all those miles away in the hills of Somersetshire, a distant and a pleasant land.

Behind the Speaker's chair Big Ludlow and Young Ludlow were in anxious conference. It was nearly seven. Where Pongo could be or what had happened to him, only Heaven knew. Those two brothers, the Government and the Opposition Whips, were anxious in their different ways to the very limits of anxiety; Big Ludlow, who really knew the game, suffered from the clear anxiety of a concise expected trouble. Young Ludlow, whose mind was as tousled as his head, suffered from an acute bewilderment as Mr. Moss concluded his harangue.

Something had gone hopelessly wrong, and at any rate it wasn't the moment for the half-wit Capthorpe to speak. Young Ludlow was despatched to Capthorpe to tell him what an infinitely finer chance he'd have after dinner. Big Ludlow hurriedly passed up a note to Worston, and when at last Mr. Moss had performed the graceful gesture I have described and had resumed his seat, Worston was seen and rose. He was under a pledge to talk and talk and talk, and talk and talk and talk he did. He thought

it rather hard ! He also was to have gone to that dinner at Madame de Schahrr's, and he thought it too bad to see the whole of his Front Bench and half the other dribble out to dress for that entertaining function while he remained holding the bridge, and talking and talking and talking and talking and talking and talking and talking.

The Chair gave him the fullest latitude, almost to the North Pole of latitude ; he talked about India in every conceivable aspect ; he brought in the loan now and then like a Jack-in-the-box, and then wandered off to Tamil, to the Brahmopootra, to Adam's Bridge, to the Missionaries, and ended up at least eight perorations with a mention of the Empire. So far as one could make out anything in the huge jelly of words, he was against guaranteeing the loan on the Relief Works—if so, he was the only man left in the House who was. The House had dwindled down to about twenty cranks, each on the spring for a speech, and two Irishmen who sat for English constituencies where the Irish were in a majority and who, having dined at an earlier hour, watched the performance with all the amusement they might have derived from a circus.

At Madame de Schahrr's the professional politicians were drowning their sorrows in wine. In the House, when Worston sat down, the

cranks talked on and on. About ten the House began to fill again. The two Front Benches dribbled in beautifully dressed and amply filled—but no Pongo !

Desperate situations require desperate remedies. Dolly staked all on Capthorpe, and Young Ludlow put the beaming Capthorpe on under a rigid promise not to talk for more than half an hour. Big Ludlow was to wind up the debate from half-past ten to eleven. Alas, for the plans of men ! Capthorpe was in form ! The half-wit was actually in form ! Never in his life had he made a speech that had not been jeered at, but that night, whether a god inspired him or whether the after-dinner enthusiasm deceived his hearers, or whether (as is more likely) his very genuine convictions—for he was a sincere man—faithfully echoed the real feeling of the Opposition, Capthorpe carried the House. When he painted the miseries of the famine, all were silent, when he alluded to the honour of Great Britain the more bibulous were prepared to weep ; when he rounded on the Government in violent but quite genuine tones, it was a mere matter of duty for all the Opposition to cheer. The Straights were beaming ! There was a body of opinion forming at last !

Capthorpe's peroration carried him a little beyond his pledge. It was really fine. Twenty

extra minutes of direct insistence upon the allocation of the loan to the relief of those millions for whom they were the guardians, and he sat down.

Big Ludlow had only ten minutes in which to reply for the Government, and Big Ludlow completely failed. His very good nature and popularity, upon which Dolly had counted so fully, ruined the position. They could not take his big bald head seriously ; they loved him too much. And the smile which was not hidden by his equally popular big brown beard took away all reality from his plea. He talked manfully—but how evident it was that he didn't care, and that Capthorpe did ! And the House was with Capthorpe.

Sister Ann, Sister Ann, do you see nothing coming down the road ? . . . It was ten minutes to eleven and no Pongo appeared. It was five minutes to eleven, and the watchers set at Pongo's room to race back if need be, reported no one ! It was eleven, the die was cast. Great Jove smiled and was satisfied ; he held the scales before him. In the one he plumped the bulk of the Duke of Battersea, in the other the skeleton of Dolly—and Dolly's scale kicked the beam. The question was put . . . the Straights challenged a division, and the whole Opposition, rising in their enthusiasm, vigorously cheered them. . . .

It was at this moment that an astonishing

figure, out of breath and threatening failure of the heart, gasped into the Government lobby.

It had very short legs and very long arms. On the legs were the braided trousers of a footman, on the arms the very short sleeves of a stout butler's coat; it wore a tie little befitting its rank; and a waistcoat the black and yellow stripes on which surely rather befitted a wasp than the ponderous abdomen which it covered. It was Pongo! . . .

He looked round him nervously. How many of his were there with him supporting Dolly? Young Ludlow, three of his own Front Bench, a gentleman of infinite sagacity called Worms—and saving they six, not one other. All the rest were followers of the Government. It was a trifle ridiculous, to have him, the leader, in one lobby and all his party in the other—but anyhow he had kept his pledge.

From the Opposition lobby poured in a solid stream all the Straights and all the remainder of the Opposition, Capthorpe marching with the triumphant stalk of a leader. The tellers approached the table, the Government tellers were on the left!

A deafening cheer announced Dolly's defeat. It was taken up again and again, and it was some minutes before the figures could be announced. The Government was beaten by exactly thirty-seven!

EPILOGUE

THE Duke of Battersea walked heavily round to Dolly's room, entered impudently enough, and asked him whether he would not come in to supper. Dolly controlled himself very well and said he would.

As they went downstairs to the motor—the old man taking the steps with difficulty, and Dolly politely supporting his arm—the Duke of Battersea said :

“ It mohst be zo ! ” And he assured Dolly in a sham apology that the City wouldn't stand anything else.

“ You don't understand,” said Dolly quietly. “ I shall dissolve at once.”

“ Vhell ? ” said the Duke of Battersea, who did *not* quite understand.

“ I'm sorry for Pongo,” sighed Dolly, as he got into the motor, and the old lump of a money-dealer was respectfully hoisted into the car by his hired servants, “ I'm sorry for Pongo ! That sort of thing ruins a man in politics ! ” And he was silent all the way home.

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A month later when the General Election had given an enormous majority in Dolly's favour, and when that majority had triumphantly repudiated the Relief Works, routed the cranks, jumped on the House of Battersea, and obediently devoted the Indian Loan to military uses, the Duke of Battersea understood certain things in the English character which had hitherto escaped him ; and, as is often the case with men of the Duke of Battersea's kind, he respected Dolly for having thrashed him soundly—but he could not forgive the house of Smith, Fischer and Co., and their commission rankled in his mind for three long years, at the close of which I am exceedingly glad to say the Duke of Battersea, having lost a good deal more money, died.

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